



ISLAM AND LIBERALISM IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF JOSEPH A. MASSAD: A CRITIQUE OF THE WESTERN NARRATIVE OF DEMOCRACY



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Abstract

This article examines Joseph A. Massad's thoughts on the relationship between Islam and liberalism, particularly the "democratic assault" on the Islamic world and the response of Islamic values. Massad argues that Western liberal claims regarding the undemocratic nature of Islam are not objective facts, but rather genealogical constructions rooted in Orientalism and cultural imperialism. This study employs a descriptive – analytical qualitative method with a socio – intellectual approach. Primary data were obtained through a documentary study of *Islam in Liberalism* (2015), supported by literature on Islam and liberalism as well as postcolonial theory. The analysis employs Michel Foucault's genealogy to trace the power – knowledge relations within Western democratic discourse. This study demonstrates that Massad deconstructs the Western narrative that positions Islam as the antithesis of democracy and reveals the efforts of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France to shape Islamic theology in accordance with their colonial and imperial interests. The main findings of this article indicate that: (1) the construction of a "democratic West" identity always requires a "despotic Islam" as its antithesis; (2) Western powers' efforts to modernize Islam constitute a form of covert cultural imperialism; and (3) a Foucauldian – based intellectual genealogical approach can uncover the hidden power relations behind the discourse on democracy and Islam. This article is expected to contribute to critical studies on the relationship between Islam and liberalism amid increasingly complex global geopolitical dynamics.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji pemikiran Joseph A. Massad tentang hubungan Islam dan liberalisme, khususnya "serangan demokrasi" terhadap dunia Islam dan respons nilai-nilai keislaman. Massad berpendapat bahwa klaim liberal Barat mengenai ketidakdemokratisan Islam bukan fakta objektif, melainkan konstruksi genealogis yang berakar pada Orientalisme dan imperialisme budaya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif-analitis dengan pendekatan sosial-intelektual. Data primer diperoleh melalui studi dokumenter terhadap *Islam in Liberalism* (2015), didukung literatur tentang Islam-liberalisme dan teori poskolonial. Analisis menggunakan genealogi Michel Foucault untuk menelusuri relasi kuasa-pengetahuan dalam wacana demokrasi Barat. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa Massad membongkar narasi Barat yang menempatkan Islam sebagai antitesis demokrasi serta mengungkap upaya Amerika Serikat, Britania Raya, dan Prancis membentuk teologi Islam sesuai kepentingan kolonial dan imperial mereka. Temuan utama artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa: (1) konstruksi identitas "Barat demokratis" selalu membutuhkan "Islam yang despotik" sebagai antitesisnya; (2) upaya modernisasi Islam oleh kekuatan Barat merupakan bentuk imperialisme budaya terselubung; dan (3) pendekatan genealogi intelektual berbasis Foucauldian mampu mengungkap relasi kuasa yang tersembunyi di balik wacana demokrasi-Islam. Artikel ini diharapkan berkontribusi pada kajian kritis tentang relasi Islam dan liberalisme di tengah dinamika geopolitik global yang semakin kompleks.



Background

The meeting between Islam and liberalism creates a complex and interesting realm of discussion along with the development of the dynamics of the contemporary world. Islam, as a religion with a long and complex history, and liberalism, as a framework of thought that emphasizes human rights, individual freedom, and democratic governance, are often seen as contradictory.¹ The clash between these two currents of thought has colored various major events in the modern world, ranging from the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the rise of political Islamic movements in various countries, to the debate on the compatibility of sharia with modern constitutionalism.² Nonetheless, a growing number of scholars and practitioners are trying to embrace harmony between Islamic values and liberal principles within a more inclusive framework.³

In both political and social domains, liberalism has driven fundamental transformations in modern governance. Concepts such as pluralism, civil liberty, and human rights often intersect with the universal ethical principles embedded in Islamic jurisprudence. However, substantive disagreements persist regarding the scope of individual freedom, minority rights, and public morality. This tension is not merely theological; it carries deep historical and geopolitical dimensions. Post–Cold War Western foreign policy, in particular, has consistently promoted liberal democracy as the sole legitimate model of governance, frequently constructing the Islamic world as culturally or structurally unprepared for democratic norms.⁴ Scholars such as Samuel Huntington popularized this binary through the "clash of civilizations" thesis.⁵ a narrative that critics argue oversimplifies Muslim political diversity while providing normative justification for Western political and military interventions The September 11, 2001 attacks marked a watershed moment that dramatically intensified the discourse positioning Islam as fundamentally incompatible with democratic values. In the aftermath of the attacks, Western governments particularly the United States systematically reframed their foreign policy agendas around the binary of "free democratic world" versus "Islamic extremism." This reframing was not merely rhetorical; it translated into concrete military interventions in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), both of which were justified, in part, through the liberal democratic mission of "liberating" Muslim societies from despotic governance. Scholars such as Mahmood Mamdani have argued that this post–9/11 discourse produced a dangerous civilizational reduction, collapsing the diversity of Muslim political thought into a monolithic category of either "good Muslims" who accept liberal democratic norms or "bad Muslims" who resist them.⁶ This binary logic, embedded

¹ Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

² Samuel P Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 109–120.

³ John L. & John O. Voll Esposito, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3–22.

⁴ Wael B Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 1–25.

⁵ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Liberalism, Liberalization and Their Impacts of Muslim Education," *Sāqafah* 8, no. 1 (2012): 183–206, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v8i1.23>.

Political Issues Model Islam Inklusif Di Indonesia Sebagai Kajian Kritik Terhadap Teori 'Clash of Civilizations' Samuel P. Huntington," *Journal of Political Issues* 3, no. 2 (2022): 62–76.,"previouslyFormattedCitation": "Ardli Johan Kusuma et al., "Journal of Political Issues Model Islam Inklusif Di Indonesia Sebagai Kajian Kritik Terhadap Teori 'Clash of Civilizations' Samuel P. Huntington," *Journal of Political Issues* 3, no. 2 (2022): 62–76.,"properties":{"noteIndex":7},"schema":"https://github.com/citation–style–

in both academic and policy circles, reinforced the genealogical construction that Massad later dismantled: that Islam, by its very nature, stands in opposition to democratic self – governance. The post – 9/11 era thus became a critical juncture in which the relationship between Islam and liberalism was no longer merely an academic debate but a geopolitical battlefield with profound consequences for Muslim communities worldwide.⁷

In an increasingly complex era of globalization, the debate on the relationship between Islam and liberalism has become one of the topics of great interest. The complexity of this relationship not only reflects different understandings of aspects of human life, but also includes political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Islam, as a religion derived from the revelation of Allah to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), provides a moral and ethical framework that covers all aspects of life. Meanwhile, liberalism, as a worldview that developed in the Enlightenment era in Europe, emphasized human rights, individual freedom, and limited government.⁸ The encounter between Islamic values and liberalism often raises questions about the extent to which these two views can coexist or the extent to which conflicts may arise.

Along with the dynamics of social and political change in the Muslim world, many Islamic societies are trying to find a balance between the profound principles of Islam and the demands of modern times that are often influenced by liberal values.⁹ The main challenge faced is how to maintain Islamic identity while still fulfilling the aspirations for freedom and progress. Various contemporary Islamic schools of thought ranging from Islamic liberalism, neo – modernism, to post – Islamism have sought to address this challenge in various ways. Some argue that there are similarities between Islamic values and the principles of liberalism, while others assert a fundamental contradiction between the two.¹⁰

In the treasure trove of academic studies on this theme, Joseph A. Massad stands out as one of the most critical and provocative voices. Massad is a professor of modern Arab intellectual history at Columbia University's Department of Middle East, South Asia, and African Studies (MESAAS). His works, notably *Islam in Liberalism* (2015) and *Desiring Arabs* (2007), have received wide attention in critical studies of Islam, post – colonialism, and international relations theory.¹¹ Massad dismantled Western liberal claims about Islam not by apologetic means, but by using rigorous genealogical analysis instruments.

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⁷ Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006): 323 – 47.

⁸ Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 3 – 20.

⁹ Nurcholish Majid, *Islam, Modernity, and Indonesianness* (Bandung: Mizan, 2008), 45 – 60.

¹⁰ Frđđric Volpi, *Political Islam Observed* (London: Hurst & Company, 2010), 21 – 30.

¹¹ Joseph A Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 1 – 18.

He points out that the discourse of "*Islam is not democratic*" is not an empirical finding, but an intellectual construct that serves certain geopolitical interests.¹²

Prior to Massad, thinkers such as Edward Said had laid a critical foundation for the representation of Islam in Western discourse through his monumental work *Orientalism* (1978).¹³ Said shows how the East, including Islam, is constructed as an inferior "other" by Western academic and political discourse. Massad developed Said's framework further by analyzing specifically how liberal values, especially democracy, were used as a new instrument of Orientalism. In addition, John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed in *Who Speaks for Islam?* (2007) provides empirical data that challenge assumptions about the incompatibility of Islam and democracy,¹⁴ while Fajri and Putra (2022) examine the constructs of Binder and Kurzman's thinking on Islam and liberalism from the perspective of Indonesian intellectuals.¹⁵

Although a substantial body of literature examines the relationship between Islam and liberalism, significant research gaps remain unaddressed. First, most existing studies prioritize normative inquiries focusing on whether Islam *should* be compatible with democracy rather than critically analyzing the genealogical constructs underlying claims of compatibility or incompatibility. Second, academic engagement with Massad's scholarship within Indonesia remains remarkably sparse, with few studies thoroughly exploring the Foucauldian methodological framework embedded in his thought.¹⁶ Third, there have not been many studies that systematically map the main findings of Massad in *Islam in Liberalism* and contextualize them in contemporary global geopolitical dynamics. This article seeks to fill this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of Massad's thought, in particular on the construction mechanisms of Islamic democracy – discourse and its implications for the identity of the Muslim world.¹⁷

The significance of this research gap becomes particularly pronounced when considered from the perspective of Indonesian Muslim intellectual discourse. As the world's largest Muslim – majority democracy, Indonesia represents a unique site where the tensions between Islamic values and liberal democratic principles have been negotiated in complex and historically specific ways. Since the fall of Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime in 1998, Indonesian public discourse has been marked by intense debates over the relationship between Islam, democracy, and national identity debates that have only intensified with the rise of Islamic conservatism in the 2010s and the politicization of religious identity in electoral politics.¹⁸ Yet despite this rich domestic context, critical engagements with thinkers such as Massad remain scarce in Indonesian academic literature. Most Indonesian scholarship on Islam and democracy has tended to adopt either an apologetic stance arguing for the compatibility of Islam with democracy on normative grounds or a purely descriptive approach that maps Islamic political

¹² Joseph A Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1 – 12.

¹³ Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3 – 28.

¹⁴ John L. & Dalia Mogahed Esposito, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (Washington D.C.: Gallup Press, 2007), 3 – 14.

¹⁵ Muhammad Rifqi, "Islam vs Liberalism: A Construct of Binder and Kurzman's Thought," *Journal of Islamic Thought* 7, no. 1 (2022): 1 – 18.

¹⁶ Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islamic Discourse: Contemporary Islamic Thought on Global Issues* (Jakarta: Paramadina Publisher, 2001), 6 – 25.

¹⁷ Squirrelly of Camille, *Islam and Democracy: A Conceptual & Historical Study* (Jakarta: Gaya Media Pratama, 2002), 6 – 18.

¹⁸ Nadirsyah Hosen, "Religion and the Indonesian Constitution : A Recent Debate," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2005): 419 – 40, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463405000238>.

movements without interrogating the power—laden discursive frameworks that shape those movements.¹⁹ By bringing Massad's genealogical critique into dialogue with the Indonesian context, this article seeks to offer a methodological corrective: rather than asking whether Indonesian Islam is or is not compatible with liberal democracy, it asks how the very terms of that question have been constructed and by whom. This shift in analytical focus, from normative compatibility to genealogical critique, opens up a more critical and historically grounded understanding of the place of Islam in contemporary democratic discourse, one that is urgently needed not only in Indonesia but across the broader Muslim world.

Drawing upon this contextual grounding, this article addresses two primary research questions: First, how does Joseph A. Massad deconstruct Western liberal claims regarding Islam and democracy? Second, how does his intellectual genealogy uncover the power relations embedded within the discourse of democratic promotion and Islamic resistance? By addressing these questions, this study aims to provide a critical analysis of Massad's contributions while offering broader insights into the intersection of religious identity, power, and geopolitical discourse in the contemporary world.

Method

Research methods are steps taken to collect data or information to obtain solutions to the research questions asked. In this study, the author uses the descriptive method of analysis to obtain descriptive data through written words derived from the thoughts of Joseph A. Massad and observable behaviors. According to Nazir, the descriptive method is an approach to studying the state of a group of people, a certain subject, certain conditions, a system of thought, or a series of events at this time.²⁰ According to Sugiyono, the analytical descriptive method is an approach that aims to analyze or provide an overview of the object of research.²¹ After describing the thoughts of the Massad character, the stage that the author does is to analyze the approach used by the character in pouring out his thoughts. The researcher uses a socio—intellectual approach with the aim of extracting a conclusion from the perspective of Joseph A. Massad, because this paper is a reinterpretation of the concept of an intellectual whose opinions are considered an important source. In addition, the author also uses other sources that have relevance and relevance to the topic being discussed.

The Complexity of the Relationship Between Islam and Liberalism

The relationship between Islam and liberalism is a landscape of thought that not only encompasses a number of historical, social, political, and philosophical factors, but also reflects the long journey of these two ideologies in the evolution of human society. Islam, as a religion that emerged in the 7th century in the Arab region, carries principles that include social justice, wealth distribution, and the protection of human rights. This view is embedded in the teachings of Islam, providing the basis for the moral and ethical values that shape Muslim society. Over time, various interpretations emerged, shaping a

¹⁹ Zuly Qodir, Bilveer Singh, and Robert W Hefner, "Conservative Turn and Islamic Populism: Challenges Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama in Contemporary Politics," *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama Dan Lintas Budaya* 7, no. 2 (2023): 105–14.

²⁰ Moh Nasir, *Research Methods* (Jakarta: Ghalia Indonesia, 1998), 63.

²¹ Suggestion, *Quantitative, qualitative and R&D research methods*, Bandung: Alfabeta., 2016, 28.

spectrum of thought ranging from conservatives to modernists who tried to adapt Islamic principles to the demands of the times.²²

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition itself, responses to liberalism have never been monolithic. The diversity of Muslim thought in engaging with liberal values reflects the internal dynamism of Islamic scholarship across different historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts. In the Indonesian context, for instance, figures such as Nurcholish Madjid championed what he termed "Islamic modernism" a project of theological renewal (*tajdid*) that sought to disentangle the universal ethical principles of Islam from historically contingent cultural practices, thereby opening a space for dialogue with liberal democratic values.²³ Similarly, organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama have developed distinct but overlapping frameworks for engaging with pluralism, civil society, and democratic governance, drawing on both classical Islamic jurisprudence and modern constitutional thought. By contrast, transnational Salafi and Islamist movements have largely rejected liberal premises on the grounds that sovereignty (*hakimiyyah*) belongs exclusively to God and cannot be delegated to human legislative bodies a position that fundamentally challenges the liberal democratic principle of popular sovereignty.²⁴ These divergent responses illustrate that the tension between Islam and liberalism is not a singular civilizational clash, as Huntington would have it, but rather a complex field of contestation internal to Muslim societies themselves, shaped by local histories, colonial legacies, and competing visions of Islamic authenticity and political modernity.²⁵

The empirical diversity of Muslim – majority states further complicates any attempt to posit a uniform relationship between Islam and liberalism. Turkey under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) represents one model, in which an Islamically –rooted political movement came to power through democratic elections while simultaneously consolidating executive authority in ways that critics argue undermine liberal democratic norms of pluralism and judicial independence.²⁶ Tunisia, by contrast, offered what many observers celebrated as the most successful case of democratic transition in the Arab Spring, driven in part by the willingness of the Islamist Ennahda movement to negotiate a power –sharing framework with secular parties and civil society organizations a pragmatic accommodation that some analysts read as an empirical refutation of the thesis of Islamic anti –democratic essentialism. Indonesia, meanwhile, occupies a distinct position as a stable Muslim –majority democracy in which Islamic political parties have consistently participated in electoral competition, yet where the rise of hardline Islamist mobilization as seen in the 2016 – 2017 protests against Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) demonstrates the continuing volatility of the intersection between religious identity and democratic politics.²⁷ These cases suggest that the relationship between Islam

²² Suaidi, "Islam and Modernism," *Islamuna: Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.19105/islamuna.v1i1.558>.

²³ Ahmad Gaus AF, "Nurcholish Madjid Dan Gagasan Pembaruan Islam," *Jurnal Maarif* 8, no. 1 (2013): 45 – 62.

²⁴ Mitsuo Nakamura, "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Observations on the 2004 General and Presidential Elections," *The Muslim World* 95, no. 2 (2005): 203 – 15.

²⁵ Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Salafi Movement in Indonesia: Transnational Dynamics and Local Development," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 1 (2007): 83 – 94.

²⁶ Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, "Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 9 (2016): 1581 – 1606.

²⁷ Vedi R. Hadiz, "Imagine All the People? Mobilising Islamic Populism for Right – Wing Politics in Indonesia," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48, no. 4 (2018): 566 – 83.

and liberalism cannot be resolved through abstract theological or philosophical argumentation alone; it is fundamentally a product of historically specific political struggles, institutional configurations, and the strategic choices of political actors operating within particular national contexts.²⁸

On the other hand, liberalism flourished in the European Enlightenment Century, responding to different contexts by emphasizing individual rights, civil liberties, and a free-market economy. The movement sparked a significant transformation in political and social thought, challenging traditional authority and pushing for a concept of society centered on individual rights. However, liberalism also has a varied range of views, ranging from classical liberalism to modern forms that emphasize inclusivity and sustainability. The complexity of this relationship is also reflected in contemporary politics, where Muslim-majority countries may apply sharia law and political structures that reflect Islamic values, but there are also modernization efforts that try to combine Islamic principles with liberal ideas.²⁹

In a philosophical context, Islamic teachings are known as a value system that bases its principles on justice, morality, and social responsibility.³⁰ Justice in Islam does not only include individual aspects, but also social aspects, with an effort to create a just and balanced society. On the contrary, liberalism in its philosophical perspective emphasizes individual rights as the basis of a just and prosperous society. Individual rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and property rights, are considered key elements that must be respected and safeguarded by governments and society. However, even though these basic principles exist, complexity arises in interpretations regarding how they are applied in everyday life.

The challenges and controversies in this relationship arise from conservative Islamic groups that oppose the principles of liberalism, deeming them incompatible with traditional Islamic values. Instead, criticism of liberalism has also emerged from various angles, highlighting its potential negative impact on social justice and community empowerment. Thus, the complexity of the relationship between Islam and liberalism encompasses the historical, social, political, and philosophical dimensions that shape human and societal thought. A deep understanding of the differences and similarities between these two ideologies is needed to pave the way to dialogue and better understanding in the midst of the dynamics of the times.³¹

The Thoughts of Joseph A. Massad: Key Findings

The first and most fundamental finding in Massad's thought is that the claim *that "Islam is undemocratic"* is a genealogical construct, not an empirical fact. In *Islam in Liberalism*, Massad explicitly states that his main focus is to understand the intellectual roots of Western liberal claims that Islam is culturally undemocratic and even anti-democratic, while also exploring the view that mainstream Christian cultural achievements, particularly in the form of Protestantism, are considered a commitment to

²⁸ Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (2004): 139–57.

²⁹ Amin Mudzakkir et al., "Islam and Politics in the Contemporary Era," *Epistemū: Journal of the Development of Islamic Science* 11, no. 1 (2016): 31–48, <https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2016.11.1.31-48>.

³⁰ Roro Fatikhin, "Social Justice in the Perspective of the Qur'an and Pancasila," *PANANGKARAN, Journal of Religious and Social Research* 1, no. 2 (2017): 293–313.

³¹ Muhammad Abror Rosyidin, "Liberalism and Conservatism in Indonesian Islamic Studies," *Mukaddimah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2023): 21–48.

democratic governance.³² This finding has major methodological implications: it diverts the question away from "*is Islam democratic?*" to "*who has an interest in defining Islam as undemocratic?*"

Massad's second finding has to do with the construction of a "*European*" identity that always requires "*Islam*" as its antithesis. Massad notes that the Eastern question that arose in Western Europe in the eighteenth century was part of a long effort since the Renaissance to establish the concept of "*Europe*" as a transcendent idea of a set of Enlightenment values that differed from the earlier historical period referred to as the Dark Ages. Roberto Dainotto noted that "*the theory of Europe from the beginning was the theory of Orientalism*," which separated Europe from the Orient, Islam, and established it as their opponent.³³ Henri Pirenne also stated that the conquest of Spain and Africa by Islam influenced the Christian Occident rulers, even mentioning that without Mohammed's role, Charlemagne would not have been imagined.³⁴

Massad's third finding concerns the role of Orientalism in shaping the discourse of Islamic – democracy. Following Edward Said's framework, Massad shows that the project of Orientalism aims to portray the West as a place with important characteristics that are always lacking in its antithesis, namely the East and Islam.³⁵ With the advent of the West, Muslim countries were recognized by Orientalism for having a common culture. Orientalists such as Sir Harold Gibb discuss how knowledge of the Islamic world is organized based on the recognition that the Muslim world forms a cultural unity with a central cultural core. Such claims not only reduce the diversity of the Islamic world, but also perpetuate the monolithic image of Islam as an inherently despotic and anti – democratic entity.³⁶

The fourth finding relates to the efforts of Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France in producing Islamic theology that conforms to their colonial and imperial orders. Massad identified that this effort to modernize Islam is carried out through various means, including education, the media, and religious institutions supported by the West.³⁷ For example, the United States established educational and religious institutions in Muslim countries that aimed to produce Islamic theology that conformed to Western values. The West also supports Muslim leaders who advocate for the modernization of Islam and liberal values. However, this attempt to modernize Islam, according to Massad, is a form of covert cultural imperialism that aims to change Islam to conform to the political and social order desired by the West.

The fifth and final finding is that the impact of liberal cultural tendencies on politics in the context of Islam and democracy is multidimensional. First, this tendency has influenced the global perception of Islam, creating an image that Islam is incompatible with the democratic values that are considered to be characteristic of the West.³⁸ Second, liberal cultural tendencies influenced efforts to produce Islamic theology that was compatible with the colonial and imperial order desired by the West. Third, in the context

³² Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*, 19-55.

³³ Dainotto, Roberto M. *Europe (in Theory)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 1 – 15.

³⁴ Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 154 – 165.

³⁵ He said, *Orientalism*, 54 – 71.

³⁶ Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*, 58 – 86.

³⁷ & Mawardi Ruslan, Idrus, "Western Domination and Its Influence on the Islamic World," *Al-Adyan: Journal of Interfaith Studies* 14, no. 1 (2019): 51 – 70.

³⁸ Haikal Fadhil Anam, "Islamic Identity Politics and Its Influence on Democracy in Indonesia," *POLITIC Journal of Islamic Political Thought* 2, no. 2 (2019): 181 – 88.

of global politics, this tendency influences efforts to promote democracy in Muslim countries by considering liberal democracy as the only valid form of government.³⁹ The perception of the conflict between Islam and democracy is often not stand – alone, but is the product of a long historical dynamic involving colonialism, post – colonialism, and the hegemony of Western discourse.⁴⁰

Analysis of Joseph A. Massad's Intellectual Approach

Joseph A. Massad used an intellectual genealogy approach to explore Western liberal claims about Islam and democracy. This approach refers to the method of analysis developed by the 20th – century French philosopher, Michel Foucault. Intellectual genealogy aims to understand and dismantle the origins, developments, and transformations of intellectual concepts and practices of power. This approach attempts to trace the history and context in which ideas and knowledge came to be rather than seeking objective essence or truth.⁴¹ Foucault opposes the idea of a single narrative or "meta-narrative" that claims to provide a comprehensive and objective explanation of history or reality; intellectual genealogy instead highlights the diversity of perspectives and investigates the power interests that may permeate those narratives.

Using an intellectual genealogical approach, Massad analyzes how Orientalism plays an important role in the analysis of Islamic society, as well as how efforts to produce Islamic theology that conform to colonial and imperial orders have influenced perceptions of Islam in global politics. In addition, Massad also highlighted how the traditions of democracy and citizenship created by Europe were implemented as part of efforts to spread democracy in Arab and Muslim countries.⁴²

Massad's main focus is on the relationship between knowledge and power. Foucault demonstrates how knowledge not only reflects reality, but is also used as a tool to control and shape reality.⁴³ In the context of genealogy, knowledge and power are considered interrelated and inseparable entities. Genealogy seeks to uncover power structures that may be hidden behind ideas or institutions including the analysis of power contained in language, classifications, social norms, and other forms of control.

Through an intellectual genealogy approach, Massad analyzes the relationship between Western liberal claims of Islam and democracy with the construction of identity, the influence of European democracy, and the production of democratic discourses that influence perceptions of Islam in global politics. Massad was particularly critical in analyzing concepts such as democracy, despotism, and civil society, as well as how these concepts were used to distinguish between the West and the East as well as the relationship between European and Euro – American liberalism and European and American policy, as well as their impact on Islamic identity and global perception.⁴⁴ Overall, Massad's analysis includes historical, political, and social dimensions to highlight

³⁹ Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 25 – 42.

⁴⁰ Abdul Jalil, "The Compatibility of Islam and Democracy: Challenges and Obstacles to Democratization in the Islamic World," *Andragogi: Journal of Educational and Religious Technical Training* 8, no. 1 (2020): 430 – 45.

⁴¹ & M. Phil Anwar, Dewi Mutiara Hikmah, *An Archaeo-Genealogical Study of Michel Foucault* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Siswa, 2020), 1 – 30.

⁴² Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 32 – 78.

⁴³ Refaldi Andika Pratama, "Power, Knowledge, and Language Hegemony in the Perspective of Michele Foucault and Francis Bacon," *Indonesian Philosophy Journal* 4, no. 1 (2021): 33 – 43.

⁴⁴ Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*, 118 – 149.

the complexity and impact of Western liberal claims about Islam and democracy, as well as the West's attempts at Islamic modernization as a strategy of cultural hegemony.

Conclusion

This paper highlights various views and interpretations in the Islamic world regarding the relationship between Islamic values and the principles of liberalism, as criticized and analyzed by Joseph A. Massad. An interdisciplinary approach is used to analyze history, philosophy, theology, politics, and society in understanding the dynamics of these relationships over time. Massad, a professor of modern Arab intellectual history at Columbia University, explores how Islam responds and defends itself to the construction of democratic discourses rooted in Orientalism and Western imperial interests.

The main findings of this article show that: first, the claim that "*Islam is undemocratic*" is a genealogical construct that serves specific geopolitical interests, not empirical facts. Second, the construction of a "*democratic West*" identity always requires "*despotic Islam*" as its antithesis. Third, the efforts to modernize Islam by Western powers are a form of covert cultural imperialism. Fourth, the Foucauldian –based intellectual genealogy approach used by Massad has proven effective in uncovering the power relations hidden behind the discourse of democracy – Islam.

Based on the above conclusions, this article contributes to understanding the relationship between Islam and liberalism from a post – colonial critical perspective, as well as highlighting the importance of defending Islamic values in the face of the challenges of Western liberal hegemony. As such, this article provides an in –depth insight into how these two views can contribute to the establishment of a more just, just, and prosperous world without having to sacrifice the identity and richness of Islamic intellectual traditions.

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