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Representations of the Other in the Sufism of the Islamic West

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ABSTRACT

Islam is characterized by its humanistic dimension and its ability to embrace different religions, based on the unity of humanity and religions in general. This peaceful thought is embodied in the principles of Sufism, where its adherents have long advocated for human unity and the unity of the divine despite religious diversity. This topic holds great significance as it reflects the spiritual dimension of Islam, which has often been overshadowed and overlooked due to certain extremist tendencies. This study aims to highlight several objectives, including the tolerance demonstrated by Sufis of the Islamic West in their interactions with the Other. Among the key findings of this research is that Sufism has championed the call for tolerance towards all religions since its early beginnings. However, its profound theories on this matter were shaped by philosophical Sufism, particularly through the doctrines of the unity of being, the unity of religions and humanity, and the religion of love, which encompasses all beliefs and faiths.

Keywords: The Other, Sufism, Unity of Being, Ibn Arabi, Emir Abdelkader.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islam is distinguished by its humanistic dimension and its capacity to embrace various religions, rooted in the shared essence of humanity and the common origin of all faiths. This humanistic aspect is manifested through Sufi thought, which is characterized by its advocacy for tolerance and peaceful coexistence among different races, sects, and religions. This peaceful outlook is fundamentally derived from prominent Sufi principles, wherein its adherents have consistently called for human unity and the oneness of the Divine, despite religious and doctrinal diversity.

One of the core Sufi principles that a disciple learns from their spiritual master is the practice of spiritual struggles and stations through which the seeker progresses to attain closeness to and love for God. True love for God cannot be realized without embracing love for all members of the human family, regardless of their backgrounds, faiths, or sects. Through this mystical vision, Sufi scholars engaged with followers of different religions, a perspective that was particularly reflected in the teachings of major Sufis, especially those of the Islamic West, such as the great master Ibn Arabi and the founder of modern Algeria, Emir Abdelkader.

The Sufi literary heritage, particularly in the Maghreb, has left behind a wealth of invaluable spiritual treasures, continuously drawing those in search of inner nourishment and those yearning for a life of transcendence and purity, free from materialistic burdens and animosities. A careful examination of

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Sufi discourse immediately reveals its elevated and refined nature, characterized by symbolism and subtle allusions, where the explicit text fades, and meanings unfold between the apparent and the hidden. This necessitates a deep engagement with the Sufi spiritual experience to unravel its symbols and decipher its mysteries.

Within this framework, the central research question arises: **How did the Sufism of the Islamic West establish the values of love and human unity in its engagement with the Other?**

To address the main research question, we break it down into several sub-questions: **Who is the "Other"? ,What is Sufism? ,What are the etymological origins of the term "Sufism"? ,Where can we discern this inclination toward religious tolerance in Sufi discourse? ,How did the Sufism of the Islamic West contribute to establishing values of tolerance within human society?**

This topic holds great significance as it represents the spiritual dimension of Islam, which has often been overlooked and obscured due to the influence of certain extremist ideologies.

Regarding previous studies, I have not come across a precise and direct study bearing this exact title. However, numerous studies address the peaceful and tolerant approach that characterizes Sufism in general. This study, however, differs from those works in that it specifically highlights the Islamic West as a beacon of tolerance towards the Other.

This research aims to achieve several key objectives, including:

1. Examining the spirit of tolerance demonstrated by the leading figures of Islamic Sufism towards the Other.
2. Exploring the efforts of Sufis in the Islamic West in establishing values of tolerance and peace.
3. Enriching scientific and academic research that highlights the role of Algerian scholars in various fields of thought and knowledge, including Sufism.

The nature of this study necessitated a descriptive methodology, aiming to outline Islamic Sufism and its epistemological approach, which is predominantly characterized by a peaceful tendency. Additionally, an analytical methodology was employed to examine and interpret select statements and poetry of Sufi figures.

The reasons for choosing this topic are twofold:

1. A personal inclination, driven by my interest in themes of peace and coexistence.
2. An academic and intellectual motivation, stemming from my engagement with Sufi and spiritual experiences across various religions.

This research is structured into an **introduction** and **two main sections**:

- The first section defines key concepts and terms relevant to the study.
- The second section explores the representations of the "Other" in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi and Emir Abdelkader Al-Jazairi.

Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main findings of the research and presents recommendations that may contribute to enriching this area of study.

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2. The "Other" in Sufi Knowledge

There is no doubt that Islam is one of the major religions that has embodied a culture of peace and tolerance towards those of different faiths. This is evident in numerous Qur'anic verses that establish this principle, alongside Prophetic traditions that reinforce the same notion. To clarify this perspective, it is essential to present some textual evidence from Islamic sources.

Before delving into this discussion, however, it is necessary to first define the "Other" and Sufism—exploring their meanings, etymological roots, origins, and historical development. This section will conclude by examining the epistemological foundations established by Sufi scholars regarding their stance on the "Other"—a framework that underpins their advocacy for universal tolerance and acceptance of all human beings.

2.1. The Concept of the "Other"

Linguistic Definition

The term "Other" is the opposite of "First", and it carries the meaning of "different"; its feminine form is "Other" (أخرى). [1]

The "Other" refers to one of two entities that belong to the same category; it also conveys the notion of difference and serves as the opposite of the First. [2]

Terminological Definition

Conceptually, the Other is the antithesis of the Self. In Plato's definition, the Other is distinct from Being. [3]

It is crucial to understand that there is an inherent interdependence between the Self-Image and the Image of the Other using either concept inevitably invokes the presence of the other. Our perception of ourselves is never formed in isolation from how we perceive the Other. Similarly, there can be no "I" without the Other, as each serves as a mirror reflecting the other. [4]

Despite the multiple linguistic and conceptual definitions of the term, a unifying meaning emerges: the Other is that which stands in contrast to the Self and the I. In this study, the term Other specifically refers to the non-Muslim, as opposed to the Muslim Self.

2.2. The Concept and Origins of Sufism

The Concept of Sufism and the Etymology of the Term

There are numerous definitions of Sufism, exceeding one hundred. One of the most well-known definitions states that **"the Sufi is the one whose heart has been purified by God."**[5]

Scholars have also debated the **etymological origin** of the term **"Sufism" (التصوف)**, leading to several interpretations, which can be summarized as follows:

1. **A non-derived (independent) term** with no linguistic root.
2. **Derived from "صفاء" (purity or clarity)** referring to the **purity of heart** characteristic of Sufis.
3. **Derived from "صوف" (wool)** as ascetics frequently wore woolen garments.

4. **Attributed to "Ahl al-Suffa" (أهل الصُفة)** a group of early **Companions** of the Prophet mohamed known for their piety.
5. **Linked to "the first row (الصف الأول)" in mosques**, symbolizing closeness to God.[6]
6. **Derived from the Greek word "Sophia" (σοφία), meaning "wisdom."** [7]

The Origins and Development of Sufism

Sufism emerged at the dawn of Islam, closely linked to the early Muslims' devotion to **Qur'anic recitation and reflection**. Contrary to claims that Sufism is foreign to Islam, its foundations are deeply rooted in the **spiritual essence of the faith**. While there may be similarities between Sufism and mystical traditions in other religions, this merely underscores the idea that **all spiritual traditions share a common essence**, despite differences in outward expressions. [8]

Sufism is a **comprehensive discipline** that integrates **ethics, psychology, and philosophy**, drawing from **Islamic jurisprudence, Hadith, Qur'anic exegesis, and the prophetic biography**. It evolved alongside the **flourishing of Islamic civilization**:

- In the 2nd and 3rd centuries AH, Sufism was primarily an ethical science.
- In the 4th and 5th centuries AH, it shifted toward inner purification and the states of the heart.
- By the 6th and 7th centuries AH, it had undergone further transformations. [9]

Over its long journey, Sufi discourse took on **three primary literary forms**: **poetry, narratives, and prose**, which together shaped the **rich Sufi heritage**. [10]

In light of the above, it is evident that:

- The term **"Sufism"** has multiple **etymological origins**, with scholars differing on its precise derivation.
- Despite **various definitions**, Sufism fundamentally concerns **the spiritual relationship between humans and their Creator**.
- Over time, Sufism evolved due to **multiple historical and intellectual influences** beyond the scope of this study.
- While some have **questioned its Islamic authenticity**, the lives of **the Prophet mohamed and his Companions** affirm its **Islamic roots**.
- Furthermore, the lives of **prophets and religious founders** suggest that **spiritual experience is a universal phenomenon across all faiths**.

3.2. Evidence of Religious Tolerance in the Qur'an and Sunnah

Allah honored the descendants of Adam, regardless of their languages, colors, religious, and intellectual beliefs, by granting them reason, will, and freedom. This diversity has led to the variety of human thoughts and beliefs, and history itself stands as evidence of this diversity. The Founder of the faith clearly established that freedom of belief is a personal right and that all divine religions originate from a single source. Regarding this, Allah says:

﴿ شَرَعَ لَكُم مِّنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ ۖ أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ ۚ كَبُرَ عَلَى الْمُشْرِكِينَ مَا تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَيْهِ ۚ اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَن يُنِيبُ﴾ *(الشورى: 13)*

A close examination of the Qur'an reveals numerous verses that establish the principle of freedom of belief as a form of tolerance and acceptance of the Other. [11]

To clarify the Islamic foundations of the humanistic dimension in religion, Islam's honoring of humanity, its tolerant stance towards other religions, and its acceptance of coexistence with those of different beliefs, I have compiled a selection of Qur'anic verses and Prophetic hadiths to illustrate this principle.

The Holy Qur'an

The Qur'an does not explicitly use the terms "coexistence with the Other" or "tolerance", but it conveys their meaning through various expressions such as benevolence, forgiveness, kindness, and reconciliation of hearts. The following are examples of how the Qur'anic discourse embodies the concept of tolerance and its implications, emphasizing kindness toward all people, regardless of their religions or sects:

- Allah says: ﴿ لا يَنْهَاكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنْ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ ۝ إِنَّمَا يَنْهَاكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنْ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ وَظَاهَرُوا عَلَى إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَنْ تَوَلَّوْهُمْ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمْ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾ . (Al-Mumtahanah: 8-9)
- Allah says: ﴿ لاَ إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَد تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ﴾. (Al-Baqarah: 256)
- Allah says: ﴿ ادْعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ۖ وَجَادِلْهُم بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِ ۖ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ﴾ (An-Nahl: 125)
- Allah says: ﴿ وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ ۖ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَٰهُنَا وَإِلَٰهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴾(Al-Ankabut: 46)

The Prophetic Sunnah

Numerous Hadiths emphasize tolerance and leniency in Islam, including:

- Sulayman ibn Dawud narrated: 'Abd al-Rahman reported from his father that 'Urwah said: 'Aisha reported that the Messenger of Allah mohamed said on that day: "Let the Jews know that there is leniency in our religion. I have been sent with a pure and tolerant monotheism." [12]
- Abd al-Razzaq narrated, saying: Ma'mar reported from al-Zuhri, from 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, from his father, that the Messenger of Allah mohamed was asked:

  "Which deeds are the best?" He replied:

  "The pure and tolerant monotheism (Al-Ḥanīfiyyah Al-Samḥah)." [13]

2.4. The Methodological Foundations of Sufism's Adoption of Tolerance and Coexistence with the Other

Undoubtedly, Sufi discourse, in most of its phases and forms, has produced a peaceful literature and promoted tolerant interactions with all people, regardless of their sects and religions. However, philosophical Sufism played a pioneering and significant role in establishing the principle of religious tolerance and coexistence with the Other. This was achieved through a core idea centered on human unity and love, asserting that religion in the sight of Allah is one, despite differences in

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religious laws (Shari‘ah). Additionally, a fundamental theory that became a hallmark of philosophical Sufi literature with Ibn Arabi playing a pivotal role in defining its principles—is the theory of the Unity of Being (Wahdat al-Wujud).

The term Shari‘ah is commonly used within the Islamic framework to refer to the comprehensive religious system of Islam, encompassing the specific laws and regulations that distinguish Islam from other religions. While most faiths share a fundamental doctrinal foundation, such as belief in God and the afterlife which entails reward and punishment as a fundamental element of divine justice they differ in their religious laws and rulings.

The Qur’an highlights these two aspects:

1. The unity of belief among religions.
2. The diversity of religious laws according to the particularities of time and place. [14]

Regarding the unity of religion, this is illustrated in the following Qur’anic verses:

- Allah says: ﴿شَرَعَ لَكُم مِّنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ ۖ أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ ۚ كَبُرَ عَلَى الْمُشْرِكِينَ مَا تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَيْهِ ۚ اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَن يُنِيبُ﴾ *(Ash-Shura: 13)*.
- Allah says: ﴿ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَىٰ وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴾ *(Al-Baqarah: 62)*.

Undoubtedly, the principle of monotheism is the foundation of all religions. In Islam, it is considered the primary purpose of divine revelation and the mission of the prophets. From the oneness of God, Islam's doctrine of the unity of religions and the human race emerged. [15]

The concept of the unity of religions was deeply embedded in Sufi literature, making it a foundation for religious tolerance. This idea aligns with the Islamic perspective that all divinely revealed religions share a common origin, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

This doctrine emerged prominently among philosophical Sufis, whose mystical worldview embraced openness to all realms, where differences and barriers dissolve in accordance with the belief in the unity of religions and the unity of existence. In this view, conflicts among humans vanish in favor of what Ibn Arabi termed "the Religion of Love," under which all beliefs are encompassed. [16]

Sufi literature has produced numerous **poetic verses** affirming that **religion, in essence, is one**. In this regard, **Al-Hallaj** says:

I contemplated religions with deep reflection ** And found them to be one root with many branches [17]

Through this verse, Al-Hallaj suggests that God cannot be confined within the framework of human beliefs, understandings, or emotions, where people attribute to Him whatever qualities they wish. The Divine cannot be limited to a mental image that restricts Him, for He is the True Object of Worship in whatever form He is worshipped. Based on this perception of religions, Al-Hallaj's approach was marked by tolerance toward all religious groups, including People of the Book and even pagans. [18]

Al-Jili further elaborates on the Muslim perspective on the unity of religions, stating:

"Know that Allah created all beings for His worship; they are innately predisposed to it by nature. There is nothing in existence that does not worship Allah through its state, its words, or its actions even through its very essence and attributes.

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Thus, all are servants of Allah by necessity. However, worship varies according to the requirements of the Divine Names and Attributes.

People have therefore differed, sects have emerged, and each group has adhered to what they perceive as the truth, even if others consider it false. But Allah has made their belief appealing to them so that they may worship Him according to the aspect dictated by the Divine Attribute influencing their perception." [19]

In its collective dimension, Ibn al-Farid affirms the unity of religion through his poetic discourse, recognizing it as the ultimate truth manifesting in all faiths, even if the worshippers themselves are unaware of this sublime reality. He expresses this in his famous Tā'iyyah al-Kubrā (The Great Tā'iyyah):

As for my creed in love, I follow no sect	**	**And if ever I deviate from it, I abandon my faith.**

These expressions clearly indicate the openness of true religion to the truth present in every faith, affirming the unity of all religions. The foundation of this unity is love, as love is both the source and the ultimate goal of every religion.

He further states:

The eyes of every faith never strayed	**	**Nor did the thoughts of any sect deviate**
And if the Magians worshipped fire and it never extinguished	**	**As mentioned in reports, for a thousand years**
They sought none but me, even if their aim	**	**Seemed elsewhere, though they did not reveal their intent.**

From these verses, we observe that Ibn al-Farid believes that all religions ultimately worship God, even if they are not consciously aware of it in their rituals. Through such philosophical and interpretive concepts, Islamic Sufis established their call for human unity, asserting that despite differences in religious practices, all people inherently seek the Absolute—God. [20]

The love of God unites humanity, and this is the core message found in all sacred scriptures. Al-Muhasibi narrates that a man once approached a pious scholar and asked for advice. The scholar responded:

"I advise you to love Allah so deeply that nothing is dearer to you than Him.
Fear Him so profoundly that nothing is more feared by you than Him.
Hope in Him so strongly that it stands between you and that fear.
And wish for others what you wish for yourself.

Now go, for I have summarized for you the teachings of the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, and the Qur'an." [21]

For the true Sufi, the mosque is established within a pure and sacred heart. The deeper one's knowledge of God, the less rigid they become towards other religions. [22]

Both Al-Bistami and Al-Niffari followed the ideas of philosophical Sufis regarding religious laws and rituals, viewing them as symbols. For Al-Niffari, the true mosque is not a physical structure built from stone, but rather a pure and sacred heart in which God is truly worshipped.

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This concept reaches its fullest and clearest expression in the thought of Ibn Arabi, particularly in his theories on the unity of religions, the Perfect Man, and the Unity of Being (Wahdat al-Wujud).[23]

The Unity of Being asserts that existence manifests itself as the Words of God, meaning that all created beings are divine words, for they originate from "Kun" (Be!)—which is itself the Word of God. Since God is the Speaker, and His speech is His very essence, and because His essence is infinite, so too is His speech. Thus, existence is unified with the existent, for God is present in all things.[24]

This is affirmed in Allah's statement: ﴿وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ﴾(Al-Hadid: 4).

Ibn Sab'in further navigates the **path of tolerant Sufi discourse** towards the **Other** in his book *"Al-Risalah Al-Faqiriyyah"* (The Treatise of Poverty), where he states:

"Peace be upon both the denier and the believer,

The scholar and the seeker,

The one in error and the one who misguides."

This statement reinforces a fundamental principle in Sufi discourse: that religious differences are not an exception, but rather a natural state of human diversity. All people, regardless of their beliefs, deserve recognition and respect. This perspective establishes an understanding of a religious framework built upon the unity of human and ethical values and the rejection of religious exclusivity or the monopoly of absolute truth. [25]

Based on the above discussion, it becomes evident that numerous Qur'anic verses affirm the unity of religion, while several Prophetic hadiths contain the seeds of tolerance and coexistence with the Other. However, philosophical Sufism—through its belief in the unity of religions, the Unity of Being (Wahdat al-Wujud), and the philosophy of divine love towards all creation—established a comprehensive Sufi philosophy that extends its embrace to all beings. It emphasizes the humanistic dimension of religion, regardless of its various traditions, laws, and denominations.

3. COEXISTENCE WITH THE OTHER AMONG THE SUFIS OF THE ISLAMIC WEST

Scholars exploring Sufi literature will find an abundance of examples showcasing Islamic mystics across the golden ages of Islamic civilization, embodying a peaceful discourse infused with calls for tolerance and coexistence with the Other. This discourse is characterized by a profound humanistic inclination, embracing all religions with a spirit of acceptance and openness.

The foundation of this tolerant approach lies in the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah, which affirm the acceptance of coexistence with those of different faiths. However, it was the theory of the Unity of Being (Wahdat al-Wujud), adopted by figures such as Al-Hallaj, Ibn al-Farid, and Jalal al-Din Rumi, that played a pivotal role in extending the concept of coexistence with the Other on humanistic grounds. These mystics viewed religions as diverse in form and structure but unified in essence and meaning.

Following a similar path, the Sufis of the Islamic West, shaped by high moral ideals and self-discipline, maintained their philosophy of love, tolerance, and peace despite facing accusations of heresy and unbelief. Among the most prominent figures in this tradition are the Great Master Ibn Arabi and Emir Abdelkader al-Jazairi.

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3.1. The Sufi Discourse on Religious Tolerance in Ibn Arabi (1165–1240 CE)

Ibn Arabi emerged as a remarkable figure, earning the title of "The Greatest Master" (Al-Shaykh al-Akbar) over the past eight centuries. He played a significant role in fostering civilizational dialogue between the East and the West.

His greatest intellectual courage is evident in his unbiased approach toward all religious, doctrinal, and ethical traditions throughout history, placing them all on equal footing without favoring one over the other. In his vision, all things become part of a greater whole, reflecting human unity. This profound notion is vividly expressed in his poetry, as illustrated in the following verses: [26]

My heart has become capable of every form	**	**A pasture for gazelles, a monastery for monks**
A temple for idols, the Kaaba for pilgrims	**	**The tablets of the Torah, and the pages of the Qur'an**
I follow the religion of love, wherever its caravans turn	**	**For love is my faith and my belief."** [27]

Through these verses, Ibn Arabi proclaims his elevation of the spiritual and humanistic dimension, which is unified by divine love despite the diversity of religious laws and expressions. He emphasizes the uniqueness of each spiritual experience.

When Ibn Arabi states that his heart has become a pasture for gazelles, he does not mean a rejection of religious beliefs, but rather the abolition of any attempt to keep a creature distant from its original source. In order for every being to reunite with the source from which it originated, it must follow the path of love, which emanates from God until it returns to its first origins. [28]

Through Tarjumān al-Ashwāq and other works, Ibn Arabi declares that he follows the religion and creed of love. For him, the matter is not about a debate between religions to determine which is the true faith and which is misguided, since the unity of religions suggests that all faiths are different manifestations of the One Truth. Therefore, there is no distinction between a disbeliever and a believer, for at their essence, all are united in monotheism. One should not be bound to a specific outward form of worship, as what truly matters is the inner reality.[29]

According to this general concept of religion, and in order to eliminate any possibility of fanaticism, Islam affirms that the judgment between followers of different faiths is left to God. There is unity in religion, yet diversity in religious laws. However, Ibn Arabi distinguishes between spiritual experience and adherence to religious laws. He bases this distinction on his understanding of the unity of religious experience, despite the differences in spiritual discipline and ascetic practices.

Additionally, Ibn Arabi expresses respect for Christian monasticism, considering monks to be among those endowed with divine knowledge, as they are aware of their spiritual path, even though they follow abrogated laws. [30]

Regarding this, Ibn Arabi states:

"It has been established for us that the Prophet mohamed forbade the killing of monks who withdrew from the world and devoted themselves entirely to their Lord. He used a general term and did not command us to call them to Islam, for he mohamed knew that they were already upon clear knowledge of their Lord.

The Prophet mohamed commanded us to convey the message and for those who hear it to pass it on to those absent. Had he mohamed not known that God Himself undertakes their guidance—just as

He guided Al-Khidr and others he would not have spoken in this manner, nor would he have approved of their adherence to a law that had been abrogated in this religion." [31]

In this context, Ibn Arabi argues that those among the Christians who worshipped Christ perceived him as divine because he fasted continuously without breaking his fast and prayed throughout the night without sleeping. This led to the claim of his divinity, and thus it was said about him: ﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ﴾ **(Al-Ma'idah: 72)**

No such claim was made about any prophet before him, as the highest assertion regarding Ezra (ʿUzayr) was that he was the son of God.

In the context of the Qur'anic verse: ﴿ لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ ۖ وَقَالَ الْمَسِيحُ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ ۖ إِنَّهُ مَن يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ الْجَنَّةَ وَمَأْوَاهُ النَّارُ ۖ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنصَارٍ ﴾ (Al-Ma'idah: 72)

Ibn Arabi does not condemn Christians as disbelievers but rather interprets the term "kufr" in its linguistic sense, meaning "concealment." [32]

That is, when God attributed disbelief (kufr) to them, it was in a way that excused them, for they did not associate partners with Him; rather, they claimed that Christ himself was God. A polytheist (mushrik) is one who ascribes another deity alongside God, whereas they did not do so. Allah says:

﴿ لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا﴾

Thus, God described them as concealing (satr) the truth when they declared the manifestation of both the divine (lahut) and human (nasut) nature of Jesus. However, Jesus (peace be upon him) warned them against this in his words:

﴿ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ﴾

Thus, they worshipped God through him. Then, it is stated:

﴿ إِنَّهُ مَن يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ الْجَنَّةَ ﴾

Meaning, He denied him his "kafan" (shroud) that conceals him, for God described them with the term "satr" (concealment) by using the word "kufr" (disbelief). [33]

If Ibn Arabi demonstrates boundless tolerance towards Christians by interpreting their kufr (disbelief) as mere concealment (satr), then even polytheists (mushrikun) are granted the possibility of salvation in his interpretations. [34]

Regarding this, he states:

"In reality, the polytheist worships none but God, for if he did not believe in the divinity of his associate (sharik), he would not have worshipped it.

﴿ وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ﴾

Therefore, the Divine was zealous over this designation, and so He punished them in this world for failing to show due reverence. Yet, He also provided for them and answered their supplications when they sought sustenance, for He knew that, despite their misattribution, they ultimately turned only toward this divine rank.

However, they suffered eternal misery because the Prophet had already directed them towards the true monotheism due to the One who truly deserves this attribution." [35]

Ibn Arabi reached a state of tolerance toward all religions by transitioning from the state of ignorance (Jahiliyyah) to the horizon of the Seal of Sainthood (Khatm al-Wilayah), thanks to his choice of the

Shari‘ah of Muhammad (peace be upon him). The Shari‘ah, in his view, is the scale of existence, having both an outer and inner dimension. It encompasses both the external and internal aspects of the human being. By practicing it externally and internally, love is unveiled, truth is revealed, and the meaning of existence and life emerges. However, this refers to the universal human meaning of religion, that is, Islam, which includes all of humanity. [36]

The Sufi discourse of Ibn Arabi has intellectual foundations and a structured framework, to which he dedicated his linguistic and intellectual abilities. It also allowed for an approach to the key principles on which Sufism is based in general, as well as its discourse and their interrelation.

The most distinctive feature of Ibn Arabi’s Sufi discourse is that it is built upon foundations that intertwine, making it contain knowledge marked by mystery, concealment, and vast imagination.[37]

Thus, Ibn Arabi remains a brilliant thinker and Sufi due to his diverse humanistic intellectual contributions. His Sufi legacy continues to transcend all forms of fanaticism and exclusion based on religion, sect, or belief. Instead, it is replaced by his human awareness of the equality of all creation before the supreme purpose of existence, which is the vicegerency of God. In this, human perfection is realized as an expression of divine perfection.

3.2. The Sufi Discourse on Religious Tolerance in Emir Abdelkader Al-Jazairi (1807–1883)

The founder of modern Algeria, Emir Abdelkader, was among the most influenced by the thought of Ibn Arabi and his prominent disciples. His dream was fulfilled when he was buried beside the Great Master. He worked to revive Ibn Arabi’s philosophy and Sufi experience, considering himself one of the most knowledgeable about his mystical philosophy. He also played a key role in publishing Ibn Arabi’s major work, Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah (The Meccan Revelations). [38]

Modern history records that Emir Abdelkader possessed a high level of human consciousness regarding the necessity of coexistence and tolerance with the Other. Although he was known as a fierce symbol of resistance against French colonialism, he was also recognized as a man of peace, one of the founders of international human rights law, and a pioneer of peaceful coexistence among people of different sects and backgrounds.

He upheld these principles more than a century and a half ago, long before the Geneva Conventions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. His achievements reflect the lofty ideals that humanity still strives to establish today, aiming to overcome fanaticism, wars, and extremism and to build human relations that eliminate racial and religious barriers, which have long driven humanity into the flames of war and conflict.

The humanistic dimension in Emir Abdelkader’s discourse stems from his Sufi upbringing, particularly regarding the philosophy of the Unity of Being (Wahdat al-Wujud), his perception of the Other, and his general view of existence. In his perspective, otherness does not exclude the Other, as it is merely conceptual rather than real.

This idea is evident in the sixty-third stance of his book Al-Mawaqif, where he states:

"For the Sufis, the reality of existence is one; it neither multiplies, fragments, nor divides… All things whether from the world of spirits and bodies, the world of imagination, or abstract intellectual meanings do not manifest or take form except through the appearance of True Existence within them, without incarnation, union, connection, or separation. Likewise, True Existence does not manifest or take form except through its creations." [39]

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Thus, existence and the Other are merely manifestations of the One God.

This distinct interpretation employed by Emir Abdelkader, through which he explains the degrees of existence and how multiplicity emerges from unity through a continuous flow of manifestations, represents a vision of existence where ranks, forms, and names constitute its subjects and figures.

This interpretation is rooted in an experience of unity, spiritual struggle, and love for existence an experience in which the distinctions between subject and object disappear. Here, the observer and the observed each reflect and express the other, just as unity expresses multiplicity, and multiplicity expresses unity, in the tradition of Ibn Arabi's school of thought. [40]

In reality, Emir Abdelkader did not limit his humanistic ideas to rigid intellectual frameworks that one merely encounters through his writings. Instead, he embodied his Sufi thought with its humanistic dimensions through various aspects of his civilized conduct. He displayed an ethical standard that astonished even his enemies in the midst of his struggle against the French occupation.

Despite the ferocity of the battles between the French forces and his valiant resistance, Emir Abdelkader demonstrated moral refinement and a unique humanistic philosophy in his treatment of prisoners, surpassing even the Geneva Conventions on Human Rights.

This was reflected in an agreement he made with Bishop Dupuch, the Bishop of Algiers at the time, which emphasized the humane treatment of prisoners. His humanitarian stance left a lasting impression on his adversaries, earning him considerable friendships, and his conditions and agreements were met with acceptance and appreciation among a significant segment of the French authorities in occupied Algeria.

Among the key provisions of this agreement were:

- Ensuring the spiritual needs of prisoners
- Guaranteeing freedom of worship by allowing clergy to visit prisons on both sides of the conflict and meet with detainees
- Offering financial rewards to soldiers who safeguarded the lives of prisoners
- Punishing anyone who violated these humanitarian principles

Additionally, Emir Abdelkader's mother personally cared for French prisoners, demonstrating the depth of his ethical commitment to justice and compassion. [41]

After Emir Abdelkader was captured and transferred to Paris, he sought to engage with the clergy of the Church of La Madeleine in 1852, as part of his ongoing effort to foster interfaith dialogue, promote respect for the Other, and encourage peaceful coexistence among people of different religions. [42]

His humanitarian stance caused unease among certain French clergymen, as one priest feared that his continued presence in France might lead some Christians to embrace Islam after witnessing his noble character, ethical conduct, and peaceful humanistic disposition. [43]

Further reflecting his peaceful nature, Emir Abdelkader is also known for protecting Christians in the Levant and European Christians. According to a report from the acting French Consul in Damascus in 1860, when Emir Abdelkader learned of the imminent danger facing European Christians, he cooperated with French authorities and offered his services to protect them. He even proposed gathering his loyal Algerian followers and personally leading them to ensure their safety.[44]

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At the same time, he did not hesitate to protect Lebanese and Damascene Christians from sectarian strife, acting in accordance with Islamic law in safeguarding the People of the Book (Ahl al-Dhimma). He turned his residence, along with those of his followers and soldiers, into a sanctuary for them.

As a result, he is credited with saving over 15,000 Christians from certain death. Furthermore, his political acumen played a decisive role in preventing the French military commander from attacking Damascus, thereby saving the city's inhabitants from an impending massacre. [45]

On July 9 of the same year, an attempt to suppress and kill the Christians of Damascus began in Bab Touma. Emir Abdelkader rushed to their rescue, aided by around 1,000 Algerian fighters. The rescue and protection operations for the Christians continued for several days, shielding them from the Druze, who intended to annihilate them.

As the violence escalated, European consuls and their families sought refuge with Emir Abdelkader, abandoning their consulates, which were left to burn. They fled to his protection, and he personally defended them for several days until the situation stabilized and the Christians felt secure enough to return to the citadel. Meanwhile, the consuls and many of the wealthier classes remained under Emir Abdelkader's care and hospitality for over a month.

Through his courage and noble character, Emir Abdelkader successfully saved the Eastern Church's Christians from certain death. In gratitude, European nations showered him with letters of appreciation, medals, and gifts. He also received a letter of admiration from the Caucasian Mujahid Imam Shamil of Dagestan. [46]

In 2006, the United Nations in Geneva honored Emir Abdelkader's legacy by organizing an exhibition to rediscover his contributions. UN officials praised his pioneering role in humanitarian law and interfaith dialogue.[47]

Thus, the concept of the Perfect Human (Al-Insan Al-Kamil) and its spiritual teachings remained deeply rooted in Emir Abdelkader's consciousness and philosophy. He emphasized that humanity shares common foundational values, while also recognizing its diverse expressions. He believed that the principle of humanity is one of the core principles emphasized by Islam and all prophets. This deep-rooted belief in coexistence defined his character, even during his resistance against French colonialism.

This study concludes that the representation of the Other in Sufi thought, including that of the Islamic West, carried with it a universal humanistic essence that permeated their poetry, prose, and daily practices. This approach was based on the unity of humanity and the unity of religion, as emphasized in various passages of the Qur'an.

Additionally, philosophical humanistic concepts, such as the doctrine of love, played a vital role in dissolving divisions and eliminating hatred and resentment. Furthermore, the philosophy of the Unity of Being (Wahdat al-Wujud), advocated by prominent Sufi philosophers, especially Ibn Arabi, and later followed by Emir Abdelkader, reinforced the idea of the unity of existence and the unity of the Divine.

4. CONCLUSION

The Sufi literary heritage has left behind a spiritual legacy that continues to illuminate and inspire humanity. The Sufism of the Islamic West was a flowing source of love, encompassing all of

humankind and shaping the principles of peace and coexistence with the Other. Based on this idea, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The concept of coexistence and religious tolerance was not a Sufi innovation detached from Islamic sources; rather, it was rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. These teachings fundamentally advocate for accepting religious diversity and the necessity of coexistence among followers of different faiths.
- The humanistic dimension of Islamic Sufism in general, and Western Islamic Sufism in particular, serves as the ideal path for fostering coexistence with the Other. It upholds religious diversity, strengthens interfaith dialogue, and acts as a strong barrier against extremism and religious fanaticism.
- Islamic Sufi discourse is the most deserving and capable of showcasing Islam as a religion that promotes tolerance and dialogue with the Other.
- Sufism has been the champion of tolerance since its early beginnings. However, its deeper theoretical foundations were developed by philosophical Sufism, particularly through Ibn Arabi's doctrines on the Unity of Being, the Unity of Religions, human unity, and the Religion of Love that embraces all faiths.
- The concept of the unity of religions had a strong presence and foundation in Emir Abdelkader's thought, which reinforced his humanistic approach and acceptance of coexistence with the Other.
- Emir Abdelkader has etched his legacy into global memory, as a Sufi, warrior, and human rights advocate. He added another honor to his legacy through his humanitarian stance towards prisoners and the Christians of the Levant.

Recommendations

It is important to present some recommendations that we believe deserve the attention of researchers and academics:

- Encouraging research on Sufi studies across its various schools, given their positive impact on both individuals and society, as well as their role in combating extremism and violence.
- Directing the efforts of Algerian researchers toward exploring and uncovering the intellectual and scientific treasures of Sufism in the Central Maghreb.

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