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Is there a concept of the enemy? To what discursive sphere would it belong? Or, if there is no concept of the enemy, what are the factors that could have prevented its articulation? Following the reflections of Carl Schmitt and Jacques Derrida on the theologico-political, and reading canonical texts from the Western philosophical, political, and religious traditions, the author seeks to account for the absence of a history of the enemy.
The question of the enemy emerges in this book as contingent on the way Europe has related to both Jew and Arab as concrete enemies. Moreover, the author provocatively argues that the Jew and the Arab constitute the condition of religion and politics. Among the many strengths of the book is the timeliness of its profound study of contemporary actuality: the volume provides a basis for a philosophical understanding of the forces at work that produced and kindled current conflicts in Europe, the U.S., and the Middle East. (Excerpt from back cover of the book The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy. Stanford University Press, 2003).

Robert Alagjozovski: Your book, The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy, has been translated into Serbian quite quickly after being published into English (according to the standards of this region). Yet as your presence upon its promotion is again not a regional standard and this interview comes before the book has become widely known to the readership, what are the main theses you elaborate in it?

Gil Anidjar: What I wanted to say in my book is quite banal, really. It is that the old principle, the old mechanism “divide et impera” rules the world today as it did in the ancient times, and it does so in so many cases. The example that interests me is the case of a division, a separation, and the alleged “eternal enmity” between Arabs and Jews. I should say that I am often asked why I write about Jews and Arabs and my answer is that I do not. Rather, I write about those who are invested in dividing them, in saying they are divided, in saying they are enemies. In the case of Jews and Arabs, as in many so-called ethnic and religious “conflicts,” one of the presup-
Identities
positions operates precisely by the use of the term “conflict,” as if there were two sides fighting. One then asks: Should they fight or should they not fight? Do they have any reasons to fight? The fact that is often forgotten, actually almost always forgotten, is whether there is a third side that has enabled, maintained, rendered possible the continuation of the so-called conflict. So one of the questions that interests me is who is it that has been invested for such a long time in describing the distinction between Arabs and Jews in terms of religion, theology and politics, in terms of religion and race, or ethnicity? Who is it that has defined the terms according to which these two are separated and according to which they cannot be united in all kinds of way? One of the interesting things between Jews and Arabs is that over the course of different periods the term “Arab” came to refer to ethnicity, while the term “Jew” came to signify a religion. That is the way things have usually been understood. But there are periods where this has been the reverse: today, for example, when one is speaking in the context of Israel, Palestine, and also in Europe, one thinks more readily of “Muslims.” So what we would have now is religion as the dividing line. On the other side of this line, we would have a secular or political identity. Jews, because they have become Zionists, are now marked as a political collective and not as a religious one (we know the clichés about the only democracy in the Middle East, with Zionism being defined as political movement, whereas the Palestinians – now with the excuse of the opposition to Hamas – are not recognized as a legitimate political movement, they are said to be just crazy fanatics, terrorists, people who are mad about God). And then, the final question is who benefits from the conflict? On the one hand there is the definition of terms, how is the difference made, and on the other who benefits from the situation. In any conflict it seems to me that the lesson to be learned is: do not look at what appears to be the image of the enemy but...
think instead of who benefits from the enmity. Clearly, if there is a war, the two sides are going to lose no matter what. And just to add so that there is no lack of clarity, to my mind, and this is what I try to show in my book, the responsibility lies in colonialism, in European colonialism, and even more in European Christendom, which is increasingly revealed as western Christendom, including both Europe, the European community, and the United States. There seems to me the determining will that maintains the conflict rather than resolve it, in spite of appearances.

When I heard that my book was going to be translated into Serbian, I was not only grateful but also surprised. My friends, who know me and read me, often ask me to translate what I say into English! I know that the translators are excellent translators, but I am sorry for I know I have produced too many difficulties in my prose and for that I apologize. I have another friend who tells me I should never write; he is not even in favour of translating anything from me. He thinks I should simply speak. He tells me that when I speak I make some sense but when I write I make no sense. That’s in case readers start reading the book: I apologize to them in advance.
R. A.: In your book you say the concept of Enemy has not been clearly defined. How is that possible? After all the atrocities, throughout the centuries. Was that intentional?

G. A.: As a philosophical problem, the massive absence of the metaphysical question *par excellence* regarding the enemy is, I think, absolutely fascinating. What is a friend? What is a true friend? These are the questions that philosophy begins with: *philosophia* thinks of itself as love and friendship. It does not concern itself with what the enemy is. The problem is that the enemy was always divided. The enemy, if you will, is constituted by religion and politics, and the historical weight of the question is entirely burdened with and constituted by the Jew and the Arab in Europe. Therefore, to the extent that an absence of a definition can be shown to be operative, it is a *structuring* absence. The absence of that question of the enemy can, in fact, be shown to structure the rapport to the enemy in the West, the rapport of the West to itself, as well, finally, as the relation between religion and politics.

R. A.: You use the term “theological-political”: is that in connection with both Christian and Islamic, as well as some Buddhist, traditions to install a theocratic state?

G. A.: No, not at all. The phrase is rather meant to signal a singular, if complex and varied, Western configuration regarding the way divisions are massively made that separate the human from the divine, the sacred from the profane, the holy and the eschatological from the secular, and so forth, all terms that are produced at the same time that they are distinguished. At the most basic level,
the phrase is also a lever, a way of interrogating, at least, the claim that secularization has occurred (or even that it should occur), to question the possibility of separating anything categorically, and most urgently, religion from politics. My own interest in writing the book was precisely to come to some understanding regarding the relation of religion to politics, on the actual possibility or impossibility of distinguishing between them. The question is: how do you define this or that difference? How did it come about that some people can assert, “I am on the side of politics” and someone else can respond by saying, “I am on the side of religion”? How did that difference even establish itself? How did people come to identify with it in the peculiar way they do today? And why do we believe in this difference? I have been trying to understand why the theologico-political is the site of difference. Everything can be a site of difference. But why is this particular site currently invested?

R. A.: You claim that secularization is another form of preserving Christianity. But the idea of secularization has been the subject of a long and bloody battle within Christianity itself?

G. A.: The West claimed to have lost religion, that secularism became triumphant. But, Europe is after all the very site of the theologico-political. In other words, Europe itself has not, has absolutely not worked out or worked through the difference it has inherited from its past, the difference, assuming that there should be one, between theology and politics, because secularized Christianity is still Christianity, however translated (Schmitt), metaphorized (Blumenberg) or perverted (Löwith). The only tradition that has found itself secularized, that has reinvented or simply transformed itself as secular, is Western Christianity, so whatever changes
Christianity has undergone in the last 300 years are still changes that *Christianity* has undergone as a cultural unit (however porous and problematic and invested in claiming its own “purity” that unit might be). Christianity has changed radically, yet it is *Christianity* that has changed, and afterwards it is still going to call itself or function as Christianity. So one could say that everything is exactly the same, and yet just a little different, to quote Walter Benjamin. Secularization is just Christianity by another name. But a different Christianity, of course.

R. A.: *In your book, you quote and then add to the brilliant analysis by Mahmood Mamdani of all the confusions provoked by the different uses of the notions of ethnicity and nationality. This is also a great problem in this region.*

G. A.: This is a very important issue, as I was telling you. In the media, in Israeli political discourse, in discussions about institutions, on Israeli ID cards, everywhere practically, “Jew” and “Arab” are the terms that persist. When people theorize that the “conflict” is theological – it is a clash of religions – they will still use the terms “Jew” and “Arab” (rather than Jew and Muslim). If they see it is a political problem – as a matter of competing nationalisms – they will still employ the same terminology (even if some try to be more “accurate” and speak then of Israelis and Palestinians). Some people then are trying to be rigorous. But the issue exceeds
Now, it might all be the effect of a certain confusion. There has been a lot of slippage between the different terms used in Western languages to refer to Muslims (Saracens, Agarenes, Turks, Mohammedans, Arabs). There is thus a broad range of terms that appear in the discourse of Europe, that do not necessarily have a changing referent, or referential range. At some level, though, I would want to say that the terms really do not have a referent; they are first of all, self-referential. These are ways for Europe to speak to itself, trying to think itself and to think itself without that which it names as the Arabs, the Turks, the Saracens, and so forth.

Israel claims to be a secular state and yet it inscribes “nationality” in the law and distinguishes it from “citizenship.” There are many categories on Israeli identity cards, and one of them is “Jew,” for example, and the other is “Arab,” and there are others, which include “Circassian” and “Druze.” So some of the categories are ethnic, while some are religious. It gets really complicated. There are Arabs who are not Muslim, and there are Muslims who are not Arab, so the terms are not symmetric. So the fact that “Arab” would claim itself in such a dominant non-religious way makes me consider it mostly, dominantly, at this point, as an ethnic marker, whereas “Jew” remains determined by a certain theology.

But we know the general mechanism: if you say this is one group, Hutu, and this is another group, Tutsi, then it
is not only enough to say that this is the Hutu, this is the Tutsi, but what you need to say is this is ethnicity, this is race. These are almost Caucasian-like Africans who came from the North, and these are ethnicity, these are pure Africans who have always lived in Africa. And the distinction multiplies and you add layers and you sediment it in law and you set different laws, different rights. These are tribal laws and these are European laws. Although there are distinctions within the European laws, there are white people and there are Tutsi people. And here, there are white people, but they are somewhere else and then there are different Hutu communities that have different tribal laws. All this is morally upsetting, but that’s colonialism for you. You make differences between people who live in the same place and you say: you are from different places and you have different laws and you sediment the distinction between them and, at the end, when you, the colonizer, leave, they kill each other. That’s perverse.

R. A.: What is interesting for us in Macedonia, but also in the whole region of ex-Yugoslavia, regarding your book is how the experience, the lessons learnt from the Middle-East conflict, refers also to our situation of conflicting sides, but also how our story, from local becomes global and the possibilities to read it through your theory of enemy, benefiting third side, etc.

G. A.: I would not want to say too much on this, but I guess there are certain parallels to be drawn from the situation described in my book and the circumstances ongoing here in the Balkans. It is obvious that not only Europe has a role in it but the US also. It is obvious that there are differences between people, between men and women, there are differences in sexual orientation there
are differences in languages, there are all kinds of differences, and there are also differences between any two individuals. The question is whether between differences, states, communities should legislate, whether they should build walls, whether they should construct all kinds of divisions, that not only acknowledge differences, but in fact make differences into walls. Now, clearly, between Arabs and Jews the fact that there is a difference is not obvious. If you are Jewish you cannot be Muslim, and on the other hand if you are Jewish you should be able to be Arab, if being Jewish means belonging to a religion. And if it is an ethnicity, then you should be able to be Jewish and Muslim. But that doesn’t seem to be a possibility. The question then is what is the difference that produces the wall. I don’t think this is something people themselves do by themselves. What needs to happen is laws, state, institutions, that sediment the difference and say the only way to deal is to erect a wall, whether the wall is made of cement, of water, or simply a metaphoric wall.

R. A.: Why have you decided to evoke the notion of “Semitites” and, in that regard, the politics of anti-semitism as apophatic unity of the Arabs and the Jews? Can this be part of the Middle-East solution? And why are you so critical towards the European part in the Middle-East conflict? You say European Christianity is responsible for the conflict?

G. A.: There was one chapter I was considering writing for the book, but did not include in the end and I am finishing it now. As a way of marking my debt to Mahmood Mamdani (following his discussion of the “Hamitic Hypothesis”), I called my paper “The Semitic Hypothesis.”
The paper examines the invention of the Semites and more importantly, their disappearance. There are no more Semites today in the sense that “Semites” is a term which, when it was invented, functioned so as to indicate an almost absolute identity between Jew and Arab, so that whatever is said about one could equally be said about the other.

This, again, has everything to do with Europe. The nineteenth century is the only period where Europe thinks of itself as secular, really secular, as having won over religion (of course not in all quarters of Europe, but certainly in intellectual, political, and cultural discourse). It is also the only moment where the theologico-political appears no longer to constitute a problem. And it is the only moment where whatever one says about the Jew, can be said about the Arab, and vice versa. There was apparently nothing at stake in abolishing the difference between them. It is an absolutely fabulous (if also horrendous) and, I think, essential moment to understand.

But interestingly enough, it is less about religion and politics – although that is also very much there – than about religion and race. I think the nineteenth century and the invention of the Semites is particularly important, however, because what happens with the Semites is the strange invention of the race said to have invented religion.

At that moment, then, race and religion become two distinct categories that are at the same time collapsed in the figure of the Semites. What is absolutely fascinating, and Edward Said describes this quite evocatively, is the way in which the Jew “bifurcated,” the way in which the animus was transferred from the Jew and the Arab to...
the Arab alone. Thus the Jews stopped being Semites. After World War II, all kinds of complicated things happened between race and religion around the Jews. Most of all, race becomes a word that cannot speak its name when one speaks about the Jews (and some account has to be given of that), whereas the last Semites and the only Semites become the Arabs. So they are a race, and the Jews are a religion. Or if you want, even vice versa. Better yet, the Arabs have become the race that is still attached to its religion, whereas the Jews have in fact become akin to Western Christians, and therefore are no longer marked, neither by race nor by religion.

So this is what interests me, at least, the way in which the difference between race and religion is articulated, the way it is deployed. And the way in which the history of its becoming has become invisible, actually is the history of the Semites. It is probably not its only history, but it is one that is crucial in terms of the West. Why did this notion of “Semites” all but disappear? Why is it that what one can say about the Jew can no longer be said about the Arab? What is the dissymmetry, when there used to be so much symmetry, if only for a short century? There are lingering effects of course: the fact that Jews and Arabs are seen as brothers or cousins, as equally fanatic or bent on destruction. But dissymmetry is now the governing rule of understanding Jews and Arabs. And I want to underscore, once again, the place of Europe in these shifts. You tell me where is the IMF where is the World Bank, who sits on the United Nations security council, you tell me how much money European cows gets, and how much water, and you tell me how much an African one gets. And you tell me who makes that decision. Now the world is not that complicated and I know we all know that. And yet we still seem to think that it is just we ourselves here having a “local” conflict. And then we have to
learn from human rights programmes about a conflict resolution.

R. A.: What is the genealogy, the source of the impossibility of being both the Jew and the Arab? Is this construction from the West or this is something else? Is this also a limitation to forming a fluid identity?

G. A.: I don’t think it is a matter of fluid identity. If I am saying I am an Arab Jew I am forming a very stable identity. And I am not looking for recognition. It is not a demand for love from anyone. I can say I am an Arab Jew, of course, but the only problem is that it means nothing because it is not about what I choose to call myself. In the book I start answering this question in the terms of theology and philosophy. Today I would elaborate further. In the work I have done after the book, I started to address the questions in terms of law and science. Just to take that same, quick example again: in the state of Israel, which claims not to be a racist state, there is a distinction that is inscribed on the identity cards, that citizens have something which is citizenship and other which is nationality. There are two ways of translating the Hebrew word for nationality. Under citizenship the word is the same for everybody, it is Israeli. Under nationality (or ethnicity), there are two main categories (there are many more) but the two main categories are “Jew” and “Arab.” What matters is that, by force of law, you cannot be both Jew and Arab. Law forbids it. It simply does not have that possibility. Now it is the state that starts addressing the matter in that way and distributing not only citizenship but rights in terms of taxes, in terms of military service, public services. Making the distinction between Jews and Arabs, this is not only for closing
Robert Alagjozovski  When the Difference Sediments in Law Interview with Gil Anidjar

dod ova i gi preraspredeluva ne samo dzhavjanstvoto
tuku i pravata vo smisla na danocii, voena obvraska,
vjvni slusby. Praveneeto razlika pomjeu Evre-
te i Arabite ne sluji samo za zaokrjuzuvanje na
odreden identitet. Toa e i rasisticka razlika.
Toa e sotavae podelba onaka kako sto se raspre-
deluvaat pravata vo zavisnost od rascitnite ni-
jansi na zaednicite, koii moce, no i ne moa da se
rasklikuvat megu sebe. Se razbira, ne sum jas toj sto
treba da реe dal meju vas ima ili nema razlika.
Prazae je zoshto dzhavata ima dava rascitni prava
i rascitni privilegii na rascitni grupi, grupi
kojto vo isto vreme se obiduva i da gi definiira.
I da dodadam samo uiste edna raba. Ne treba da se
npavri grezhatka da se pomisli deka neendnakvosta
se odnesuva samo na Evreninot i Arabinot. Kakko re-
zultat na neendnakvosta, nekoj drug, znaeci nekoj drug,
koo mocebi ne e Arabin ili E evrein, ima korist od
situationata, iako vo slucajot na Izrael evrejskoto
malcinство sekogash dobiva. Prazaeeto ne e daali
da se zahtetat malcinstvata, jas nemam nishto pro-
tiv toa, i toa treba da biede ozakoneto, prazaneto e
koj ima korist od pravejeto rascili i koj rascprede-
lava prava na rasciten nachin.

R. A.: И кога ќе заврши сејо ова? Дали некогаш
вообшто ќе заврши? Заедно со интезресот што
се соодава зад него?

G. A.: За жал, јас не сум пророк. Можам само да се
надевам дека работите брзо ќе се сменат. Но, не сум
многу убеден во мојата надеж сè додека – најпросто
кажано – како во случајот на Палестина и Јзраел,
или како во случајот на Франција, две малцинства
се поттикнуваат едно против друго, Евреите и мус-
lmanite, i se dodeka dzhavata ima namera da gi
ubiva svoite grahani. Znachi, dzhavata gi sotava

R. A.: And when do you think this situation will end?
Will it ever end? Together with the interest which lies
behind it?

G. A.: Unfortunately I am not a prophet. I cannot help
but believing that things could change very quickly. But I
am not completely convinced by my own hope as long as
– let me put this very simply – in the case of Israel and
Palestine, or in the case in France, two minorities are
being played against each other, namely Jews and Muslims,
as long as the state is about killing its citizens. It is about
making citizens in the form of death rather than in the
Identities form of life. So whether the solution is one state solution, which is what I believe, yes, but it has to be state very different than it is now, a state that would finally be dedicated to its citizens rather than against them. But just to be clear, as long as the US does not want peace and Europe does not want peace in Jerusalem (and think why is it that in Jerusalem they do not want peace between Jews and Muslims, I wonder whether there might be a particular reason, but aside from other economic interests), as long as the U.S. and Europe as well do not want peace, there simply won’t be peace. The moment they decide, truly decide, that there should be peace, there will be peace, in the way they know how to make peace.

R. A.: Is this division between Jews and Arabs maintained so that the Wall shouldn’t be torn down and they should unite against the third, the external enemy?

G. A.: In this case as in many others I think that the real enemy should be identified. So whether there is going to be war between the Jews and Arabs against the Christianized West, no, I don’t think there is anybody interested in that. If the US and Europe decide to cease not only intervening but in stopping to rearrange the world everywhere, then we could perhaps start to see what will happen. I don’t think that the first thing that two enemies who have been made into enemies would want to do is to start a new war. The whole tale about Islamic war on the west is simply fiction.
R. A.: You and your Department at Columbia University have been subjected to severe criticism, especially after 9/11. So, who is your enemy and do you feel endangered?

G. A.: No I think that the mistake not to make, which I think is very important, is that, although, maybe professionally, we might be at some risk, I think that danger is nothing compared to the state of the world. In America we live very comfortable lives, and even if Columbia does not give me tenure, to me or to my much more vulnerable Palestinian colleague (something which would be a big scandal), I don't think it means that we are abandoned. We are not under bombs, we are not to be killed, and our lives are not in danger. And I want to register that I am in fact in a much more privileged position than my Palestinian colleague, who is in a very difficult situation, if only because I have an American passport and he doesn’t. So there are distinctions to be made here too.

But as professors, who are coming up for tenure, I don’t think we are in danger in the true sense of the word. We are under attack, that is not in question, but we need to put things into perspective, if you are going to take an oppositional position, surely, you are going to make enemies. And the enemies, in fact, are, those who are in power. So we need to take it seriously but I cannot expect people who I disagree with to protect me. I don’t want to be protected; I just want to continue saying what I say. If I were not able to say it at Columbia I would say it somewhere else. In fact I am not that worried. So I don’t think it is danger, but I think it is troubling. I think it says a lot about American democracy, I think it says a lot about American racism, it says a lot about the way in which America is supporting Israel and the Zionist agenda, and I think it is part of a campaign to make people like my colleagues and myself shut up, but we are not shutting up.
R. A.: So what do you think about local resistance that exists in Israel; not all Israelis are in favour of American and Israeli politics in the region?

G. A.: I mean I respect that, some of my friends are there; I think it is very important to support them and to keep talking about it. To the extent that there is a public sphere one needs to talk about that. But it seems to me, fundamentally, in the political struggle you need to walk from both sides, but solidarity does not mean to me saying: you know, Israel is complicated and we have to support the resistance that exists inside it. For the most part, Israel is a racist state, and for the most part, as much as it pains me to say that, the majority of Israelis, the Israeli institutions, the Israeli laws are racist. I wish it weren’t that way, even if they do not admit it, it is the way it is – in terms of their political choices, in terms of their privilege and their not making noise that they are privileged and their actions in oppressing Palestinians. So I wish I could say I know you are a good person. You know, many Germans were in fact good persons – many people think the Germans were bad – I don’t think even Hitler was bad, Hitler thought he was doing the right thing, and that’s the problem. It is when you think that you are doing good, doing the right thing, then it becomes a problem. I mean not necessarily, of course, but sometimes you can do the worst thing in the name of the right thing. So yes, there are Israelis who are opposing the state in its policy against Palestinians, and they should continue and we should support them, but that’s not the reason not to criticize the state as state, not to criticize Israel as a nation, insofar as the major-
R. A.: You are often blamed for abandoning your pedagogic and dispassionate scientific position in favour of the political and activist one. How do you react to that and how do you see the American campus today. Is 1968 possible today in America?

G. A.: I wish it were. The distinction between academics and politics is a political distinction. It serves a political purpose. So I don’t accept it. My scholarship is rigorous. I know what it means to be a scholar; I do the best that I can in terms of my scholarship. That does not mean I don’t make mistakes, but that does not mean that it has no political meaning. Always. Even when I am saying I am only asking questions scholarly, and not politically, that is political statement. It functions within a political context. It also says I am not dealing with politics, which means I let the politics of the day go and function the way they do and I don’t comment or intervene. That’s a political choice. So you recognize that the distinction is not hermetic. And if I, as an academic and a scholar, would like to take a political position and do research in a way which recognizes that the distinction is in fact a political distinction, then I need to make a stand. And I am making a stand no matter what I say. So I am simply making it clear and exclusive. And rather than say I am only doing the scholarly thing, not intervening into the political sphere so that politicians can do what they want,
I simply say, as a scholar, here is my scholarly perspective so that I can participate more actively in the political debate. And that’s what I do. If they criticize me, they criticize me. I don’t expect the critics always to understand or to agree with me, since their political opinion is predicated upon the distinction between the scholarly and the political. That’s their political opinion. My political and scholarly opinion is that the distinction between the scholarly and the political is not hermetic.

Превод од англиски јазик: Роберт Алађозовски