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Western Universalism and the Suburbs of Humanity: A Commentary on 9/11

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Separate Universalism and Humanity's Suburbs

Several days after the September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., the president of the Italian Council, Berlusconi, declared that western civilization is superior to Islam. His comment drew my attention less than the reactions of European leaders who rushed to condemn this view in the name of the equality of civilizations and the diversity of values in Europe. Actually, Berlusconi is a responsible European, although perhaps not very commendable, but at least he said aloud what many were thinking. In sum, many people believe there is a hierarchy governing relations between civilizations, and to continue the logic, one civilization, occidental, is superior to all the others, especially Islam,[1] regardless of what "Islam" means. Is it a civilization, religion, ethnic group, political ideology? Even if one does not agree with the principle of intrinsic superiority of one civilization over all others, one cannot ignore, I think, the actual political and economic hierarchy in the conflicting relations between civilizations or cultures at any time in history. This hierarchy is clear on the political plane: let us not forget European colonialism and imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and all the other forms of neo-colonialism which took up the traces; on the economic plane: with the dominance of market values like profit, competition, individualism, utilitarianism; on the cultural plane: the West conceives, produces and controls most forms of artistic expression, media support, scientific knowledge, technology, et cetera.; and above all on the ideological plane: the West has the power to represent itself and others in a historical framework dominated by the values of progress, liberty, and democracy as constructed since the eighteenth century. Of course, the contrast of dominated and dominant is not always so rigid—as evidenced by strategies of misappropriation and recuperation—and the frontier between them is not always so opaque—as evidenced by readjustments and revisions of their boundaries. As for the dominated, we can cite the reinterpretation of "proper" values in the West (claiming a universal openness, requiring respect everywhere for human rights); the diversion of military techniques or scientific and technological capacities—many have commented on the technological ingenuity of the 9/11 terrorists, apparently forgetting that technology has for a long time led to appropriation in this part of the world. Especially among fundamentalist movements, the redirection of media has been important: Al-Jazira

broke the monopoly and censorship of government and American media to offer to the world a more pluralistic and balanced point of view on international events.

In practice, the universalistic principle which today guides Western actions and perceptions of the world is not one which wants civilization to belong to all humanity, and in which the different components contribute to equality. It does not correspond to an open and critical universalism which affirms everywhere the same rights and duties, everywhere a single humanity which should profit—with equal work and equal participation in the international collective effort—from the same aspirations, the same possibilities, the same liberties, and the same rights. Despite its apparent relativism—"let us respect the diversity and plurality of cultures"—the Western conception, or more precisely, Western practice remains based in a conquering vision from the nineteenth century which underlines the civilizing mission of the West in the world. The politically correct declaration that all cultures are equal is fallacious inasmuch as it does not say that some are more equal than others; or it hides the conflictual and hierarchical rapport which structures relations between cultures. Western universalism I call a particular universalism, in the sense that the same source which pronounces the rules also oversees their application. That universalism produces the suburbs of humanity.[2]

With respect to the universe of values, institutions, ideas, objects, and the commodities of modern life that the West produces, Islam and the other civilizations seem like cultures of second rank. Judged by the measure of the West, they often have nothing to propose, unless it is a passé and folkloristic vision of humanity, and in this respect they are often available, or more precisely, consumable on the market of touristic cultural and "ethnic" diversity. Or even worse, they are seen as a competing and menacing version, and in this respect incomprehensible and reprehensible to liberty and progress. Thus it accomplishes nothing to recall that Islamic civilization had its hour of glory and that it contributed, like so many others, to the expansion of humanity (for example, in the domains of mathematics, astronomy, architecture, medicine, poetry, and mysticism). The Islamic world can no longer gain all those riches, due to its authoritarian political regimes and relative intellectual weakness, and also because of its situation of dependence on the periphery of globalization and its symbolic inferiority vis à vis the West. These limitations prevent it from making clear what constructive and positive contributions it could make to the world. It does no good to recall that the Islamic religion was once more tolerant than it seems to be today in the eyes of many (but we should not fall into some glorification of religious tolerance, knowing that religions often constitute frontiers between peoples, not just bridges). It does no good to recall the relation of Islam and Judaism, which never led to pogroms and certainly not to holocaust. As subjects of the king of Morocco for example, Moroccan Jews were protected against the Vichy laws, and thus saved from the deportation that unfortunately trapped the Jews of French nationality.[3]

Universal Universalism and Particular Universalism

We must put in perspective the type of universalism practiced by the West, and especially by Americans in connection with the Arab-Israeli conflict. Certainly the confrontation which divides the West and Islam has several modules: it concerns geopolitical and strategic interests in these regions, the control of oil receipts, neo-colonial domination, the problem of integrating the Muslim religion in the Christian West, without even mentioning the different imaginaries tied to conflicts in preceding centuries. But the crisis of the Middle East has become the truly great discord between the two parties, for it becomes more and more a symbolic game in which the rules are decided by Western hegemony. It seems that in effect the West is seeking to displace onto this part of the world a worry which has troubled European consciences for decades, that is guilt for the Jewish genocide. Seen from the West, this catastrophe—for which not only Nazi Germany but all the other collaborating European nations and peoples were responsible—misrepresents, at least from the point of view of Arabs and Muslims, conflicts in this region. One conflict is between the state, Israel, whose legitimacy derives more and more from primordial reference to the Shoah, and the Palestinians, who are direct victims of a colonial situation. As to what should be the attitude of the Arabs toward the Shoah, Edward Saïd (1997/98) expressed the problem best. According to him:

> even if one thinks—with Tom Segev, for instance, in his book *The Seventh Million*—that Israel exploits the holocaust for political ends, there is no doubt that the collective memory of this tragedy and the weight of fear that burdens Jews today should not be minimized. Certainly there were other massacres in the history of humanity. ...But this does not justify that one reduce the horror and terror at the singular tragedy suffered by the Jewish people. [Saïd 1997/98:32-36]

Saïd adds that if "the connection is made between what happened to the Jews in the Second World War and the catastrophe [nakba] that the Palestinian people lived...one cannot do it as a rhetorical tactic or as an argument to annul or diminish the true significance either of the holocaust or of the tragedy of 1948. They are not equivalent; neither excuses current violence and neither should be minimized" (Saïd 1997/98:32-36).

Emphasizing the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust, as an event incomparable to other genocides or catastrophes experienced by other peoples in the course of recent or less recent history, risks weakening the idea of universalism, the idea of equal treatment of people in the face of tragedy.[4] Thus, for instance, the genocide perpetrated in Rwanda in 1994, like another committed a year later in Bosnia, was labeled at the request of President Clinton as a "humanitarian crisis." According to Rony Brauman, former president of Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), "this releases the international community from all obligation to bring an

end to the massacre" (2001:11). Such a choice could validate the idea of a divided humanity, the idea that some humans are more human than others.[5] The recent choice of a Holocaust Jew as the ultimate referent for American memory,[6] in a sort of catechism of civil society, indicates the sympathy of American Christian fundamentalists for the "Israeli people" returning to the "promised land."[7] Paradoxically, the importance of the Holocaust in US memory seems to reinforce particularist religious identities and, by privileging certain segments of humanity at the cost of others, also seems to weaken the integrationist and universalist sensibilities at the heart of multicultural American society itself.[8] In fact, the Holocaust, like all other episodes of humanity either glorious or horrible, has to be part of humanity's common heritage and take its place in the heart of all histories, especially the history of Europe, where responsibility for the Holocaust lies (and not with Palestinians and Arabs).

The hegemonic universalism practiced today by the United States (or rather "America," which is another sign underlining the symbolic domination of this empire) is dangerous, for it often ends in two weights, two measures. Concerned with political, economic, cultural, and symbolic preeminence, America must act in terms of its interests—material as well as symbolic—without really concerning itself with the construction of an open and critical universalism. The American vision of politics is far from concerned with long range planning, guided by the problems and values which affect all humanity. America proposes instead a self-interested and immediate policy. It consists of seizing the opportunities offered by the international environment with the goal of preserving the "American way of life" so fundamental to American ideology (e.g. the "perfect union," "general well-being," and "domestic tranquility,") that these values are inscribed in the constitution of the country![9] America is not, unlike most other nations including European nations, a model in constant negotiation, in constant development. The US thinks of itself as an already realized utopia, a here and now El Dorado, and the American is a citizen who is not called upon to change or improve himself, but to be what he is.[10] Americanism flows automatically from the positive destiny of a country touched by divine grace. America is a country "out of history" in a world which remains borne from history and subject to its sudden jolts. From this come the persistent misunderstandings between this extreme West and almost all of the rest of the world. The American exception pushes its dependents to think that nothing merits being elevated to such a high dignity; this view presumes the eradication, as an unsupportable but necessary evil, of all that which is not oneself.[11] In this sense, the phrase repeated since the 9/11 attacks, "Nothing will be the same," can be understood as meaning: "If this catastrophe can happen to us Americans, it will be a hundred times worse for others; if things have changed for us, they must change even more radically for others."

My interpretation could seem too culturalist. One must nuance the picture by emphasizing political, economic, and ideological institutions which produce this "American mentality" briefly described above. One must at the same time underline the contradictions, conflicts, and challenges that the hegemonic ideology of the United

States in fact arouses in American civil society, which is certainly far from homogeneous and consensual. Nonetheless, the hegemonic American ideology expresses the tone of this culturalist perception and gives it its strength. The culturalist approach, usually applied to the peripheries by those who talk about universalism and control its application—with the general goal to close others in irreducible identities and to fix them in predefined roles—is also an interpretive framework that the center could apply to itself. The latter, which seems like a universal person, considers his own particularities to be the form of all humanity.[12] The particular WE—here American—takes itself for the universal human race. To say it another way, to be American is to be particular and general at the same time. In identifying the particular and the general, the self and the universal, culturalism, that is to say essentialization, comes into full play.

To advance the debate, it is important to distinguish between the universalism one professes and the universalism one practices. Actually, what we observe is that behind the declarations of principal on the promotion and respect for democratic values, individual liberty, free flow of capital and goods (but rarely of persons), the American government is ready to accommodate, even to support, all forms of tribalism and ethnicism, inasmuch as these forms can serve its strategic interests and in some measure those of the rest of the "free world." It is no secret that a large part of the fundamentalist political movements of Islamist inspiration were formed, encouraged, and supported by the US government to fight against communism (the old enemy of the "free world"), especially in Afghanistan,[13] to contain progressive or nationalist movements in the Arab and Muslim world, or quite simply to maintain zones of tension in the region in order to control them. The American government also sustained certain Islamic movements as possible alternatives for wobbly regimes, for example, in Algeria. One could thus ask why the United States is the primary backer of the most fundamentalist and the most authoritarian regimes that the Muslim world has known in its history, like the Gulf states or Pakistan (a country "where the only thing which works is trickery," to repeat the words of Nobelist V.S. Naipaul (2001)). It is to control the oil wells, enjoy military bases, and seat its hegemony in the region that the United States has sustained obscure, corrupt, repressive, or misogynist countries like Wahhabite Arabia, where women can not even drive cars. Where are the beautiful words on the emancipation and respect for the liberty of women that the Occident has been prompt, in other circumstances and in other places, to employ as it denounces female submission in autocratic and phallocratic societies (unduly generalizing to other Arab or Muslim states)? One must recall here that the right to vote was acquired in some of these countries well before western Europe, for instance in 1934 in Turkey (before France) and in 1956 in Tunisia (before Switzerland)! Does the West believe all of a sudden that women, or men, enjoy great liberty in the Gulf region? Is it not evidence of a kind of cowardice or a hypocrisy when the United States closes its eyes on the denial of the most fundamental rights, while arguing for the plurality of cultures and respect for local customs. It is as if we were facing here two types of feminine humanity, on the one hand Western women, whose destiny is to

be free and equal with men--even if this perception has to be nuanced in view of certain inequalities and persistent prejudices in the West--and on the other hand Oriental women, submissive by their essence or by atavism, reinforcing the idea that this is the natural condition of women! But, as noted by the eminent American anthropologist Laura Nader (1991), this concern for women expressed on both sides, and sometimes with insistence from the West, in fact further divides (and therefore further serves to control) both groups of women.

The union of these regimes with the economic interests of the West, on the one hand encourages police repression against supporters of democracy, women, and religious, ethnic, and social minorities in these countries, and on the other hand engenders waves of fanatic Islamists, pure products of the religious ideology put in place by these same regimes, whose crusade against Western "unbelievers" is not the least of its features. These regimes manipulate religious values with the goal of making their subjects forget their servile dependence on America, of turning their attention from the systemic corruption,[14] and of maintaining strong societal coercion.[15] Once more, the Marxist analysis that "religion is the opiate of the people" seems right. America, and more generally the West, have the means to rid Muslim peoples of authoritarian and corrupt regimes, the true creators of terrorism. Yet, they would rather keep their hands on the oil wealth of the region by dividing humans into two categories, the civilized who are capable of respecting human rights and are the only ones capable of development and progress, and the others, the new barbarians, living at the margins of the empire, which they threaten with their fanaticism and violence. It is regularly suggested that the absence of respect for the rights of men and women in these countries is due to the inability of these people to put rights into practice. There are many western commentators who recalled after 9/11 the Western origin of the rights of man, thus "ontologizing" the differences and maintaining the self-fulfilling prophecy of Huntington on the "clash of cultures," a thesis which, as we know, mistakes the outcome (conflicts and contradictions resulting from historical contingencies) with the cause (the irreconcilable clash of values between the Christian West and the Arab-Muslim East).

The same Manichean view is also present in discussions about the authors of terrorist violence. The US government calls terrorist anyone confronting its interests or its injustice, and justifies its own violence as a legitimate, measured, civilized reaction. American linguist Noam Chomsky (2001:10) recently underlined, "almost always, it was us who killed, and the combat took place outside our national territory." He recalled that "for more than two hundred years we, Americans, have expelled or exterminated indigenous Indian populations, that is to say millions of people, conquered half of Mexico, ravaged the regions in the Caribbean and Central America, invaded Haiti and the Philippines, killing 100,000 Filipinos that time. Then, after the Second World War, we have extended our global control in the familiar manner." In the same vein, twenty years ago, the government of Ronald Reagan put into place a huge international terrorist network, which undertook bloody operations in all the

corners of the planet, in particular on Latin America (Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Honduras, Nicaragua particularly).[16]

Hegemonic Universalism against Alternative Models

Mohammed Arkoun (2001:16), an Algerian-French philosopher, claims that "today, it is the rest of the world, that we don't even call the third world any more, which has been reduced to a leftover," and underlines that if we continue only to interest ourselves in values from the historic context of the philosophy and morality of the West, if we only think of this one path, there is a great risk of negative reactions, and sterile outcomes for these residual people. Hegemonic universalism, such as it is represented today by American power and the globalization of economic and financial structures, creates a strong obstacle to the development of other alternative models. After having everywhere fought revolutionary movements, whether of nationalist, Marxist or other inspiration, and after having thought history ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the US, and behind her the "free world," seems today to find in Islamism an appropriate adversary.

In other words, when Islam is not instrumentalized (both by the US and by the authoritarian Arab and Muslim regimes)—in order to produce an extreme form of manipulation of religious identity to impose a totalitarian socio-political model—it is not considered, or ignored, as a source for the elaboration of progressive thought battling for personal dignity and liberty, economic and social equality, political democracy, and liberty of thought and expression. Then, like any religion, there is no reason to suppose that Islam has to be considered intrinsically reactionary, or as incapable of reforming itself profoundly, or even reforming sufficiently enough to be so inspired with Western values that it will continue to enrich its sensibilities. Yet, there are certain social, political, and intellectual movements in Islam which go beyond fundamentalist religious belief. In Iran, for example, but also elsewhere, one can see for twenty years experimentation with the Western values of democracy, individualization, promotion of citizenship and the emancipation of women from a crucible of history and a symbolism which comes from this religious tradition but which is on the way to transform itself radically. This is clearly not the case in other dogmatic and retrograde forms of political and ideological Islam, which are more limited. It is not the case either, paradoxically, with the "Turkish" secularism imposed by authority from on high, where the symbolic universe of religion remains present underneath, working clandestinely in society, and often constituting the only recourse against the total absence of public liberty and hopes of development.

Islam, one must admit, since the fourteenth century has imposed on itself an intellectual and cultural decadence. It has put into parentheses the role which at a certain historical moment was played by philosophy, to such a point that Muslims themselves cannot go there to construct tools of historical and anthropological research necessary for reappropriating their own past and for the production of

modernity. The Islam which was expressed in the crush of decolonization was cut off from this need for intellectuality. The avoidance of thought which characterizes it now, about Islam itself but also about Christianity, Judaism, and. the categories of rationality and secularization, limits this religion to a narrow horizon. In not submitting itself to reasonable critique, in recent decades Islam has aggravated the divorce between contemporary Islamic discourse and the classic age of Islamic thought from the seventh to the thirteenth century. According to Arkoun (2001:16), "today, still, Muslims don't know how to talk about this period, for there is a significant lack of historical Islamic research. Unable to understand our heritage, we cannot have an equal dialogue with Europeans about the foundations of new values." In fact, Islam slept during its "Middle Age" while Europe was waking up, and thus a theory of decay rather than a theory of progress is needed to think about this religion. One must reverse the approach that is applied to Western civilization to understand, as we are invited to do by the Iranian philosopher Javad Tabatabai (2001:12), "why the Islamic countries have not been able to manage the heritage of their renaissance and how they lead Islam to decay." Of course, by historicizing it, one has to take apart this vision of Islam. In reevaluating the weight of historical conjectures from inside and outside, notably the processes of globalization which took place in Europe since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and which progressively marginalized the Muslim world, one will understand certain current situations are less the results of Islam as religion, than the results of its instrumentalization.

It is probably the difficulty of thinking about or admitting its decay, coupled with the recognition of its current low status, above all in the West, its immediate geographic neighbor, its companion in history, which is at the base of the exacerbation of feelings and hostility in these regions of the world. In the Muslim imaginary, the fact of belonging to a coherent civilization that was powerful and often surpassed the West, is essential. When this feeling is sublimated, it leads to all the frustrations which in turn lead to the demonization of "the enemy."[17] Here too, one must understand that the recourse to a myth of a "golden age," and to the reconstruction of an ideal past identity represents a strategy which permits those who are in a situation of domination to find, if not historic initiative, at least self-esteem and the right of protest.

This said, it follows that the survival of Islam, and of the rest of humanity, demands internal reform. Islam must not take a position in a monolithic dominating and conquering universalism, but can contribute to the construction, with other traditions and emulating them, of an open universalism that humanity so seems to need today.[18] To the contrary, Islam risks being left out not only in the eyes of non-Muslims but equally in the eyes of its own adherents.

Ending the "Clash" of Civilizations by Twinning the West and Islam

The French philosopher René Girard (2001) evoked the image of twinning to demystify the events of 9/11. In this image, the protagonists in a crisis all suffer from an identical violence. Girard thinks that:

> if one insists too much on the differences between the West and the Islamic world, for example, as is done often, one misses the question of what is identical, the inverse double, twinning. One doesn't see the secret identity that exists between opponents, an identity forged in the rivalry between two "similars" that I call "mimetic": Islam feels itself to be a loser, so last that it fails to be a rival. [Girard 2001:11][19]

This "mimetic" relation that ties two adversaries has in the particular case of Islam and the West an even deeper history. Not only among those who are "assimilated" or occupy an intermediate place, Islam feels itself to be Western. It feels itself Western for religious reasons (the sharing of the same Semitic tradition and the same spiritual values as the Christian and Jewish West), historic reasons (the countless ties both peaceful and conflicted, woven since the seventh century), and cultural reasons (its role as channel for science and other civilizing traits). A semiologic perspective, attentive to the symbols and deep anthropological categories, could redesign the civilizational space shared by Islam and the West—which one must distinguish from a technological space, in which Japan has become an essential actor. Such a perspective would readjust the view on the two cultures to create a common tradition of thought, which Mohammed Arkoun indicates by the term "greco-semitic cultural arena." This proximity, though most frequently met with Western silence, is nonetheless present in the universe of the West and its afterthoughts. It works underground to reemerge—often too near. Think about the "sense of malaise" described by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955:468): "at the nearness of Islam" for which he knows, according to him, "only too many reasons." He "finds in it the universe from which he comes." "Islam is the West of the East," and for this reason, he "forgives it badly" its "display of its image."

Islam which expresses itself today, among other possibilities in the form of terrorism, is an Islam discontented with the lot that history has reserved for it. It denounces its systematic confinement attitude by the West and does not want to be excluded from the benefits of civilization. But faced with the blockage of even the slightest impulses to re-equilibrate, there must be someone like Bin Laden to satanize America and more generally the West. In his discourse, the latter sustains a litany of battle against Americans, the "supporters of atheism," of "moral corruption," and of "evil on the earth."[20] On the other side, even before the attacks, America had drawn around itself a *cordon sanitaire* against "evil." Representing America as the "kingdom of the children of God," American messianism becomes the weapon of combat against the "evil empire," represented not long ago by the USSR and today by

these "new barbarians" who are "mad with God." The appeal to a "crusade of good against evil" or to "infinite justice" in the name of "enduring freedom" which followed the attacks contained an overt religious tone not unlike the eschatological ambiance of the Islamic fundamentalists who instigated the New York and Washington, D.C. attacks.[21]

Islam is inscribed in such an eschatological movement because it considers itself the last revealed religion, and in this role is called to spread itself in the world; it also considers only "true believers" to be able to contain the grave disorder at the end of the world. This explains the suicidal determination of the attackers and their indifference to the suffering created by their acts, convinced as they were that they were carrying out a prophecy and that their deaths would serve God's cause. This eschatological foundation which emerges in certain fringes of Islam is not dissimilar from certain Christian religious traditions which appeared at several historical periods (e.g. the Crusades, the various millenary movements in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and the conquest of the New World). More recently, during the second half of the nineteenth century up to the eve of the First World War and even later, Catholic and American Protestant fundamentalisms revived apocalyptic themes denouncing a materialist world corrupted by modernity. These sentiments have not disappeared. They reappear, certainly in a marginal fashion, in the sectarian manifestations in which the outcome is sometimes tragic (collective suicide) or again in the ideological discourse of certain fringes of the Western establishment itself. Thus, for instance, a televangelist who was an influential ally of President George W. Bush, and at the right of the Republican party, could state on television after the 9/11 attacks, even if he distanced himself later from his remarks, "It is the pagans, the abortionists, the feminists, the gays, the lesbians, and the ACLU whose attempt to secularize America made this happen. I tell them that in pointing them out" (Jerry Falwell, reported in Clemons 2001).

This is not about equating Bin Laden with George W. Bush or America with the "terrorists," but about trying to understand, from a general anthropological perspective, both the philosophical, political and historical basis of the events that we live today and their possible consequences for the future of current conflicts and more generally the future of mankind. The horror aroused by the attacks on the United States cannot allow us to forget that a similar fanatic not long ago characterized the West, and can recur with even more power if we think we are beyond it. We cannot forget that the demonization of the enemy, whoever does it, leads to the denial of personhood and humanity.

Acknowledgements

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[1] Berlusconi was in a way right for the wrong reasons. Actually, everything not being absolutely relative—since a paradigm is itself absolute—it would be inconsistent on the part of Berlusconi—or anyone else in the same situation—to continue to prefer to be Roman Catholic and Western in civilization if he was convinced that Islam and Arab civilization were better. But Berlusconi did not stop there, since he had a tendency, like many others, to make his own principles absolute, that is to say, to affirm the absolute superiority of the West. This remark was suggested to me by the subtle reflections on the question by colleague Mike Singleton of Louvain la Neuve in Belgium.

[2] As Sophie Bessis (2001:9) has noted in the French newspaper *Libération*, "Its supremacy, now so ancient that it doesn't know any more how to think outside of it, has for a long time convinced the West of three things: first that its wish to guarantee its permanence was perfectly legitimate, next that it has a vocation to be the only pronouncer of the norms called upon to rule the ensemble of humanity, finally that these latter will grow out of infancy by taking it as a model. ...To become western is the horizon proposed to these 'others' who have come into the imperial orbit. But besides the fact that the proposed model is the product of a special history, the holders of world power have multiplied the obstacles to imitation."

[3] In his book *Juif Maghrébin* Félix Nataf (1978) reports that it is in memory of the resistance of the Moroccan authorities to the directives of their French colonial rulers that the Jews of the

kingdom pray each year at Yom Kippur "for the prosperity of the Beloved King and of his family." Even in Israel, a good number of Jews of Moroccan origin continue to see in the sultan of Morocco a protector, and even recognize him as their sovereign. If the historic relations between Jews and Arabs were not especially good or especially bad—but in all cases nobody witnessed in this region of the world the exclusions that were experienced by the Jews of Europe—these relations have been completely falsified by the creation of the state of Israel. It was claimed as an inalienable national right, the only refuge, moreover, for a persecuted people who were victims of genocide, but the Arab world quickly saw this move as a colonial act of exploitation of the Palestinian people. The hostility between the two parties resulted also, if not more, from the asymmetric relation between them. An integral part of the West from the point of view of its lifestyle and values, Israel carried toward its neighbors the same scorn that Europe or the West in general developed for "lower" dominated cultures like those of the Arab and Muslim Middle East. This situation is certainly insupportable for the Arabs who only see the display of the greatest arrogance, towards which decades-long resentment is being now transformed into a sentiment of pronounced judeophobia.

[4] One should specify here that to put the *Shoah* in a universal perspective and to consider it thus with other genocides that other people have experienced, does in no way destroy its specific character, its quality of an irreducible historic experience lived by the Jewish people. As has noted Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias (2001), it is maybe better to claim "specificity" than "uniqueness" in this genocide.

[5] To illustrate in another area the principle of double humanity, at the time of the airplane crash in New York on November 12, 2001 an insurer affirmed, despite his conscience about proceeding with sordid calculations, that the damages paid to the families of victims would cost less since the majority of the passengers were of Dominican origin.

[6] It is remarkable that Washington, D.C., the United States capital, has an impressive museum about the Holocaust, but no commemoration of the millions of African slaves imported to the continent or of the extermination of Native Americans.

[7] Actually, in the foundation myth of America, the crossing of the Atlantic by the Mayflower represents in some way a new Exodus from Egypt, a new crossing of the Red Sea which leads to a new Promised Land. In this new political territory which were the United States, God reached his fullness. Régis Debray (2001), in his last book, *Dieu, un itinéraire* maintains equally this kind of interpretation. This symbolic relation postulated between the two peoples is put forward by some to explain (justify) the "indestructable" solidarity which today ties the U.S. to Israel. The psychoanalyst and French writer Daniel Sibony (2001:6) thinks thus that the U.S.A. will never let Israel down, "not because it is the basis of their oil interests, that would rather be Arabia,... but because they share the same God, who lets himself share, or rather they share a book (the Old Testament counts for more in the great Protestant liberal country than in Catholic or Jacobin France). The Bible then, which besides is the first great Zionist manual; the return to Zion is announced on half the pages." In doing this, Sibony shows well, as we will see later, how the stronger, who presents itself at the same time as the universal, founds its legitimacy on a primordial and irreducible cultural identity, such as to marginalize and declass others. Sympathy for Israel and for the Jews out also result from an identification with the victims of the *Shoah* (above all by non-Jews). An identification which would serve as a moral warning and an index of truth, as notes Jean-Jacques Delfour (2001), who adds that "having failed to save the victims themselves, the fact of wanting to protect them or to save their memory, to prevent their oblivion ... all this is exploitable and augments

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self-love. To militate for victims is to inscribe oneself in the an imaginary bond with the Jews, the resisters, and the soldiers who fought the Nazis" (278).

[8] On this question, see the last book of Peter Novick (1999), *The Holocaust in American Life.*

[9] See the article by Laurence Kaufmann and Fabrice Clément (2001).

[10] This promethean vision of American ideology turns into "silent despair" as we are told by the American writer Stewart O'Nan, who declares this in response to a question in the newspaper *Libération* (2001:3): "Everyone feels he is a hero, all failure is unpatriotic. Yet, many human undertakings are doomed to fail. It is not natural to win and to impose one's will all the time. However, in the USA, nobody tolerates failure, it's shameful. So people swallow their shame, hide it, keep it inside. It's not surprising that this explodes as violence or changes into chronic despair. The world is beautiful, it is full, but it is also sad and empty. And in this country, it seems that people do not want to recognize the sad and empty side."

[11] See the rubric "daily" of Pierre Marcel (2001) entitled "Américain Positivement."

[12] This image of particular universalism is like that which characterizes hegemonic masculine discourse. Man, in effect, is this special being (*vir*) which takes himself for the general human being (*homo*). The androcentric bias creates a vision of the world expressed from the male point of view, which takes itself as reference point for social totality.

[13] Mr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Director in the Carter administration, openly boasted about the "trap" set by the Americans for the Soviets in 1978, which consisted, by means of mujahedin attacks—armed, organized, and trained by the CIA—against the communist regime in Kabul, to attract them onto the Afghan territory which they invaded at the end of the next year. Nobody knows more than the CIA and its ally ISIS, the Pakistani secret service, about the genesis and development of the fundamentalist group of Bin Laden. This summary has been brought together by, among others, Noam Chomsky (2001) in his article "Le terrorisme est d'abord l'arme des puissants."

[14] This is why Saudi Arabia exported its rigorous Wahhabi ideology and its Islamists abroad, notably to Bosnia, Chechnya, and Afghanistan, not only for religious proselytizing, but also to relieve the political pressure they created domestically.

[15] In a commentary in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, Robert Malley (2001), a former advisor to President Clinton, expressed very well this contradiction within Arab authoritarian regimes (the chief ones being Egypt and Saudi Arabia): "The more their legitimacy is attacked, the more the Arab countries need the political and military American umbrella. But the stronger their ties with the U.S.A., the more precarious is their legitimacy. This is the paradox: the pillars of Arab power are at the same time the alliance with the U.S. in fact and the denunciation of its policies by words." This explains the schizophrenia that is more and more rampant in these societies, a schizophrenia which expresses itself, among other ways, through the official media which authorize antisemitic sermons and articles, for example, when Egypt entertains close relations with Israel, or when the media sustain rumors and the most shameful and ridiculous disinformation, such as the idea that Princess Diana was not killed in a car accident, but assassinated by the British Secret Service at the command of the queen, because she was was bearing the child of an Arab.

[16] In a recent text, "Ben Laden, secret de famille de l'Amérique" (2001), the Indian novelist Arundhati Roy evokes "the millions of dead in Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia, the 17,500 dead when Israel in 1982, invaded south Lebanon with the support of the United States, the tens of thousands of Iraqis dead during the operation "Desert Storm," the thousands of Palestinians killed in battling the occupation of the Occupied Territories by Israel ... the millions of dead in Yugoslavia, Somalia, Haiti, Chile, Nicaragua, Salvador, Dominican Republic, Panama—

countries directed by terrorists, dictators, authors of genocide that the American government sustains, forms, finances and arms. The list is far from being exhaustive" (15).

[17] Thus notes the political philosopher Zaki Laïdi (2001:14): "If this historical fact (the sense of having belonged to a great civilization) going back more than ten centuries, had not existed, Islamism would probably not have this strong aura."

[18] In its actual state, Islam as an essentially religious model cannot fulfill its claimed role as an alternative model to the West. In any case, a theological model, even one with universalist pretentions like Islam, will not be the most propitious for the desired renewal of the idea of universalism. This would, on the contrary, risk falling into another particular universalism. As Umberto Eco (2001) notes, one of the major strengths of the West is to have "elaborated the capacity to freely lay bare its own contradictions....We are always putting our parameters under discussion. The western world is made so that it accepts that its own citizens can deny all positive value to the parameter of technological development, and become buddhist, or go live in a community where one refuses to use tires." It is this ability for critique which must be enlarged, deepened, and cultivated on the scale of all cultures and all societies.

[19] Arundhati Roy (2001:15) has also used this image of the double. "What is Osama Bin Laden?" she wonders. "It is the family secret of America, the black double of its president. The wild twin of all that prides itself on beauty and civilization. ... Now that the family secret is out, the twins are in each other and become little by little interchangeable. Their cannons, their bombs, their money and their drugs loop around in a moment. The Stinger missiles awaiting American helicopters were furnished by the CIA; the heroin consumed by American addicts comes from Afghanistan; the Bush administration recently paid 43 million dollars to finance its anti-drug battle."

[20] In one of his videocassettes broadcast on December 26, 2001, Bin Laden commented about the events of 9/11 in order to praise the strikes "against world atheism and the head of atheism, America."

[21] Arundhati Roy (2001: 15) notes for her part that "Bush and Ben Laden use the same terminology. Each represents the head of a serpent in the eyes of the other. Neither avoids invoking God and a vague millenarist vocabulary through which run notions of good and evil."