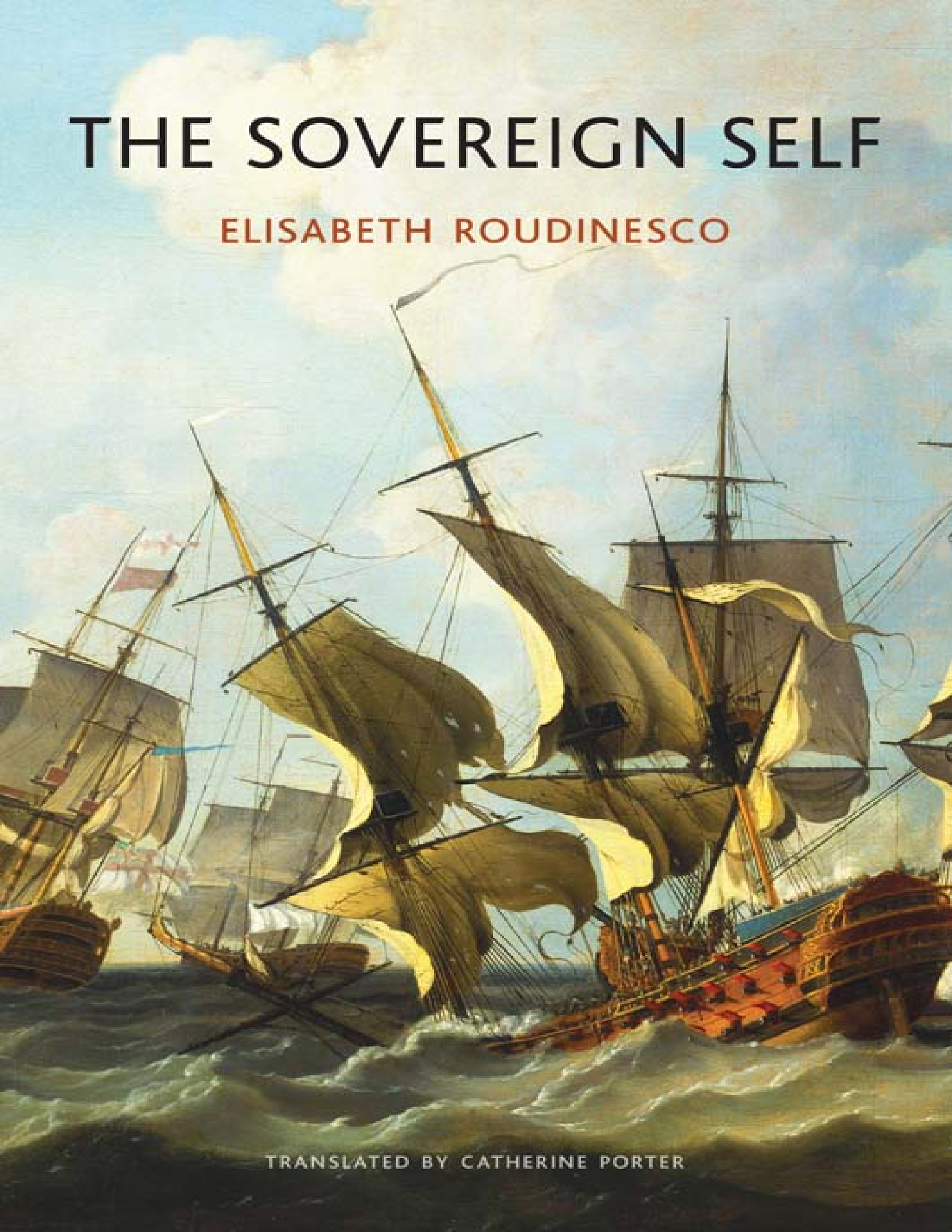
THE SOVEREIGN SELF

ELISABETH ROUDINESCO



TRANSLATED BY CATHERINE PORTER

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The Sovereign Self

Pitfalls of Identity Politics

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Translated by Catherine Porter

polity

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Epigraph

The brighter the light, the darker the shadows . . . One cannot fully appreciate the light without knowing the dark.

Jean-Paul Sartre

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PREFACE

During the last 20 years or so, liberation movements have changed direction, or so it seems. Instead of seeking ways to transform the world, to make it a better place, they focus on protecting populations from what is threatening them: increasing inequalities, social invisibility, moral impoverishment.

Their goals are thus the inverse of those they had been pursuing for a century. The struggle is no longer to bring about progress; indeed, what progress has wrought is sometimes contested. Instead, suffering is put on display, offenses are denounced, free rein is given to affect: these are all markers of identity that express a desire for visibility, sometimes in order to express indignation, sometimes in order to demand recognition.[1] Art and literature are not exempt from the phenomenon, since literature has never been as preoccupied with "lived experience" as it is today. Novelists seek less to reconstruct a global reality than to tell their own stories without critical distance, through the use of autofiction[2] or even abjection; such devices allow authors to duplicate themselves ad infinitum by affirming that everything is true because it is all invented. Hence the chameleon syndrome. You put a chameleon on something green and it turns green; on something blue, and it turns blue; on something plaid, and it goes crazy, it explodes, it dies.

Gérard Noiriel, a historian of social movements, has noted that archives are less frequented by professional historians than by amateur "history lovers" who often turn to them in order to reconstitute their own family tree, to "tell the story of their village, their ancestors, their community, etc."[3] This self-affirmation – transformed into self-inflation – would

thus be the distinctive sign of an epoch in which each individual seeks to be himself or herself as sovereign, as king or queen rather than as someone else.[4] But, in counterpoint, there is another way of submitting to the identitarian impulse: withdrawal.

Identity can be defined in several different ways. If one says “I am myself,” or “I think, therefore I am,” or “Who am I if I am not what I am inhabiting,” or “It thinks there where I am not,” or “*I* is another,”[5] or, why not, “I depend on an alterity,” or “I depend on others to know who I am,” or even “I am Charlie,”[6] one is affirming the existence of a universal identity – conscious, unconscious, imbued with freedom, divided, always “other” while being oneself, independent of the contingencies of the biological body or the territory of origin. This form of self-identification rejects “belonging” in the sense of rootedness; it suggests, rather, that identity is above all multiple and that it includes the stranger in oneself.[7] But if, on the contrary, identity is conflated with belonging, the subject is thereby reduced to a single identity, or to several ranked identities; the idea that “I am myself, that’s all there is to it”[8] is erased. It is this second definition of identity, largely inspired by works of post-Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation, that will be examined in the pages that follow.

In the first chapter, I consider some modern forms of identity attribution,[9] each more regrettable than the next, that translate into a determination to dismiss alterity altogether by reducing the human being to one particular experience. In the second chapter, I analyze the variations that have reshaped the notion of “gender.” This notion has gradually drifted to the point where it is no longer used as a conceptual tool intended to illuminate an emancipatory approach to the history of women – as was the case until

about 2000 – but is used instead to bolster, in social and political life, a normative ideology of belonging that can be stretched so far that it dissolves the boundaries between sex and gender.

In the three subsequent chapters, we shall look at the various metamorphoses of the idea of “race.” After having been expunged from the discourse of science and the humanities in 1945, the notion has been put back into play by so-called “post-colonial,” “subaltern,” and “decolonial” studies, under the influence of a few great works by theorists of modernity, most notably Aimé Césaire, Edward Said, Franz Fanon, and Jacques Derrida. On this terrain, too, conceptual tools forged with rare finesse have been extravagantly reinterpreted, in order to shore up the ideals of a new conformity with the norm; we find traces of this as much among certain supporters of queer transgenderism as among the Indigènes de la République[10] and other movements that have set out in search of an undiscoverable identity politics.

In each phase of this study, I attempt to analyze the abundant neologisms that accompany the jargonistic language of all these currents.

In the final chapter, I examine the way in which the notion of “national identity” has come back into the polemical discourse of the far right in France, haunted by the terror of a “great replacement” attributed to a demonized alterity and its manifestations: immigration, Islam, May 1968, surrogate motherhood, the French Revolution, and so on. This discourse fetishizes an imaginary past so as to promote repudiation of the present and thereby to endorse what the identitarians of the other camp condemn: identity construed as white, masculine, virile, colonialist, Western, and so forth. For these nationalist identitarians – who identify themselves moreover as Identitarians with a capital

I – our villages of yesteryear, our schools, our churches, and our values are threatened by the new barbarians: Euro Disney, Indian surrogate mothers, parents who give their children unpronounceable names, polygamous communities, and so on.

In conclusion, and at the end of this immersion in the dark corners of identitarian thinking, where delirium, conspiracy theories, rejection of the other, incitement to murder, and racialized accounts of subjectivity are often part of the mix, I shall indicate several paths that may help lead us away from despair and toward a possible world in which everyone can adhere to the principle according to which "I am myself, that's all there is to it," without denying the diversity of human communities or essentializing either universality or difference. "Neither too close nor too far apart," as Claude Lévi-Strauss was wont to say in asserting that the imposition of a uniform worldview is just as deadly as the disintegration of a culture. That is the fundamental message of this study.

Notes

1 See Myriam Revault d'Allonnes, *L'homme compassionnel* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

2 This neologism was created by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, in connection with his novel *Fils*, to designate a literary genre inherited from Proust that includes the expression of the unconscious in the story of the self without reducing it to a confessional outpouring centered on the suffering of the self in question.

3 Gérard Noiriel, "Patrick Boucheron: Un historien sans gilet jaune," blog, February 11, 2019: https://noiriel.wordpress.com/2019/02/11/patrick-boucheron-un-historien-sans-gilet-jaune/. [Here and

elsewhere, translations not otherwise attributed or identified as (anonymous) translations from the French are my own. – *Translator's note*.]

4 Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blarney (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1990] 1992). [The French title of this book¸ *Soi-même comme un roi* (literally Oneself as a King), echoes Ricoeur's *Soi-même comme un autre*. – *Translator's note*.]

5 Arthur Rimbaud, "Lettre du voyant," to Paul Demeny, May 15, 1871, in *Lettres du voyant: 13 et 15 mai 1871* (Geneva: Droz, 1975).

6 "Je suis Charlie" was widely adopted as an expression of solidarity after the 2015 assassination of several journalists working for the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris. – *Translator's note*.

7 See Jacques Derrida, *The Monolinguism of the Other, or The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, [1996] 1998).

8 According to the lovely formula offered by Michel Serres in an opinion piece titled "Faute" (*Libération*, November 18, 2009).

9 Guy Sorman characterizes this attribution as an "identitarian horror": "Finissons-en avec cet odieux discours réactionnaire!" *Le Monde*, October 1, 2016.

10 *Indigènes de la République* (Indigenes of the [French] Republic) is the name of a movement described by its founders in 2005 as antiracist and decolonial; it became a political party in 2008. – *Translator's note*.

___ 1 ___
ASSIGNING IDENTITIES

Beirut 2005: Who am I?

At an evening event in Beirut, following a colloquium held in May 2005 on psychoanalysis in the Arab and Islamic world,[1] I had the opportunity to meet an important patron of the press, the erudite and elegant Ghassan Tueni. He greeted me enthusiastically: he was delighted, he said, to receive an "Orthodox" in his sumptuous residence. Astonished, I told him I was not Orthodox, and he responded at once: "But you're Romanian!" And he added that he himself belonged to the Greek Orthodox community and that his first wife was a Druze, so he was accustomed to "mixed identities." After telling him that I was neither Romanian nor Orthodox, but that my family included Jews and Protestants, I stressed that I had been brought up as a Catholic by non-believing parents who had transmitted to me so little of the traditions of the faith that I considered myself an atheist – or "a-religious" – without being necessarily anticlerical; I knew nothing about "mixed identities." Not without humor, he retorted: "So you're a Christian atheist, Orthodox in origin and Catholic by denomination." Being neither a committed atheist nor truly Christian, although I had been baptized, I ended up explaining to him that my mother, attached above all to republican *laïcité*, or secularism,[2] had come from an Alsatian family, Protestant on her father's side and "Parisian Israelite" on her mother's, and that both sides preferred the label HSP (High Protestant Society), which allowed them to bypass the word "Jew" in the name of a militant assimilationism. As for my father, who came from

an ultra-Francophile and non-observant Jewish family in Bucharest, he detested synagogues and rabbis as well as popes, and he adhered to the ideals of the Republic without reservation. Thus he preferred to call himself a "Voltairean," even though for strictly aesthetic reasons he was a fervent admirer of the Roman Catholic Church and especially of Renaissance painting. Italy was his second fatherland after France, and Rome was his favorite city. Alarmed by anti-Semitism and concerned with successful integration, he was inclined to lie about his origins, stressing that his father was Orthodox and that he himself had converted to Catholicism.

As for me, this way of dissimulating one's Jewishness, whether by claiming to be an "Israelite" or asserting a denominational Christian identity, struck me as a delusional practice from another era. Another guest came to join our conversation and remarked that, without being of French ancestry (*française de souche*), I had acquired "French citizenship." I was obliged to respond that that terminology did not fit my case, and moreover that I was neither a French citizen *de souche* (of French stock) – since *souches* did not exist any more than races did – nor a French citizen by acquisition, since I was born French to French parents. As for "the identity of France" he was questioning me about, I replied by citing from memory what Fernand Braudel had said on the subject. The identity of France, I said, has nothing to do with any sort of "national identity," French or otherwise. There is no such thing as a pure and perfect identity. The identity of "France" is always splintered, between its regions and its cities, for example, or between its divergent ideals, even if the French Republic is constitutionally indivisible, secular, and social.[3] France is nothing other than the France described by Jules Michelet: a plurality of Frances "stitched together," that is, the France constructed around Paris, which ended up imposing

itself on the other Frances. Such is the French France, then, composed of all the migratory contributions from all over the world, with its traditions, its language, and its intellectual eminence. French civilization would not exist without the influx of strangers foreign to the “identity of France.” As Braudel insisted in 1985:

Let me start by saying once and for all that I love France with the same demanding and complicated passion as did Jules Michelet, without distinguishing between its good points and its bad, between what I like and what I find harder to accept … I am determined to talk about France as if it were another country, another fatherland, another nation.[4]

In the course of this conversation in Beirut, which had all the elements of a certain type of Jewish joke (“You say you’re going to Krakow so I’ll believe you’re going to Łódź”), I was thus obliged for the first time in my life to explain to a highly cultured person, a reader of Paul Valéry who was well-versed in the old European humanism, that I was quite simply French, a French citizen, of French nationality, born in Paris, and that I did not speak a word of Romanian, a language that my father used only when he was mad at his sister, my elderly aunt. It was simpler for me to claim this “Frenchness” than to keep on making identitarian contortions such “I am Jewish-Romanian-Alsatian-half German,” and why not a quarter Viennese by my maternal ancestor Julius Popper, conqueror of Patagonia, and also marked with the stamp of “whiteness.” My interlocutor burst out laughing. “Of course! And I’m Lebanese. But let’s say that you are first of all Orthodox because you have a Romanian name. So we are both attached to the canonical autocephalous Orthodox churches. Moreover, I want you to meet my second wife

Chadia; she's Orthodox too, a bookseller, and passionate about psychoanalysis."

Coming from a Lebanese man accustomed to living in a country at war, affiliated with one of the 17 religions recognized by the government, there was nothing surprising about this statement. Moreover, he could only have had an exchange like this one with a foreigner: questioning a Lebanese compatriot about his identity would be seriously incongruous, because in that universe belonging to a denominational community goes without saying. And faith is a private affair, separate from any form of identity. For each subject, identity is defined on the basis of a constraint: the obligation to belong to one of the 17 communities, each of which has its own legislation and its own jurisdictions where personal status is concerned. No subjective, political, national, sexual, or social identity is possible without such a marker.[5] In this configuration, identity does not stem from any religion or faith at all, but rather from membership: in a tribe, a clan, or an ethnic group. Established under the French mandate with the best intentions in the world, this communitarian system was supposed to ensure respect for the age-old equilibriums that had been transmitted from generation to generation – the only way, it was said, to avoid erasing or reifying the various identities. And yet, during that colloquium, the Lebanese participants – and Ghassan Tueni himself – had occasion to say that they did not approve of that system and that they tended to prefer the French Enlightenment, secularism, and a conception of democracy based on citizenship that was far removed from all the denominational forms of organization of which they were at once victims, heirs, and protagonists.

The journalist and historian Samir Kassir, an editorial writer at the daily newspaper *an-Nahar* and a defender of the Palestinian cause, had helped organize the colloquium;

he was convinced that psychoanalysis conveyed in itself, independently of its representatives, a form of subjectivity that was threatening to totalitarianism, nationalism, and identitarian fanaticism. He had defied censorship many times. In his talk, he demonstrated his attachment to the ideals of Arabic humanism, reiterating his preference for the universalism of the Enlightenment and his rejection of a narrow communitarianism. He was fighting against Hezbollah and the Syrian dictatorship alike. A few days after he spoke at the colloquium – an act that, as we knew, put him at great risk – he was assassinated in a car bomb attack. In December, Gebran Tueni, Ghassan's son, met the same fate.

Secularisms

For my part, I have always found the principle of secularism superior to all others for the purpose of guaranteeing freedom of conscience and the transmission of knowledge, and this was my conviction long before we were confronted with the drift toward identitarianism in France, even if the question of Islam had already arisen. Still, I feel no hostility in principle toward culturalism, relativism, or religions in general; indeed, I consider the differences among them necessary to an understanding of what is universal. But I reject the project of making secularism a new religion inhabited by a dogmatic universalism applicable to all nations. To my mind, diversity and mixing alone are sources of progress. It is nevertheless the case that, without a minimum of secularism, no nation can escape from the grip of religion, especially when religion is conflated with a project of political conquest, that is, when religious markers are on public display. This is why, even though I am well aware that numerous forms of secularism exist throughout the world, forms as

respectable and effective as the French model, I would readily subscribe to the general idea according to which secularism, as such, generates more freedom than any religion invested with political power.[6]

By the same token, I contend that only secularism can guarantee freedom of conscience and, most importantly, that only secularism can keep every subject from being assigned to a particular identity. This is, moreover, the reason why I supported a law proposed in 1989 to forbid the wearing of the Islamic headscarf in schools in France, since the law affected girls who were minors. I never understood that law as leading back to some sort of "neo-colonial exclusion" aimed at the representatives of a particular community. In France, in fact, the republican school system is based on an ideal that aims to detach children to some degree from their families, their origins, and the particular features of their identity, an ideal that makes the struggle against the ascendancy of any particular religion the principle of an egalitarian education. By virtue of this principle, no pupil has the right to exhibit, on school grounds, any ostentatious sign indicating religious affiliation: a visible crucifix, kippa, or headscarf.[7] The fact remains that France is the only country in the world to proclaim such a model of republican secularism. And the model must be defended at all costs, because it embodies a tradition that grew out of the Revolution and the separation between church and state. Nevertheless, it is hard to argue that it is superior to all others and can therefore be exported. To try to impose this model on all the peoples of the world would be both imperialist and suicidal.

Very different from Ghassan Tueni, Father Sélim Abou, the rector of Saint-Joseph University and a participant in the evening event in Beirut, was a magnificent Jesuit who reminded me of Michel de Certeau. An ardent Freudian, an

anticolonialist anthropologist, a keen observer of Latin America and Canada, he had studied the tragic epic of the Jesuit Republic of the Guaranis, and had reflected at great length on the “identitarian question,” preferring cosmopolitanism to any form of assigned identity, even denominational.[8] He stressed, moreover, that the more economic globalization advanced, the more the equally barbaric identitarian reaction intensified, in counterpoint, as if the homogenization of lifestyles, under the impetus of the market, went hand in hand with the search for supposed “roots.” In this perspective, the globalization of economic exchange was thus accompanied by a resurgence of the most reactionary identitarian anguish: fear of the abolition of sexual differences, of the erasure of sovereignties and borders, fear of the disappearance of the family, of the father, of the mother; hatred of homosexuals, Arabs, foreigners, and so on.[9]

Sélim Abou thus invoked Montesquieu’s well-known judgment against that infernal spiral:

If I knew something useful to my nation but ruinous to another, I would not offer it to my prince, because I am a man before I am a Frenchman, or because I am necessarily a man and a Frenchman only by chance. If I knew something useful to me and harmful to my family, I would put it out of my mind. If I knew something useful to my family but not to my country, I would try to forget it. If I knew of something useful to my country and harmful to Europe, or useful to Europe and harmful to the human race, I would view it as a crime.[10]

Montesquieu’s approach was the best antidote, Abou suggested, against extreme provocations like those of Jean-Marie Le Pen, a French far-right politician who went around reiterating ad nauseum his adherence to the principles of a hierarchy of identities based on generalized

endogamy, with arguments like the following: I love my daughters more than my cousins, my cousins more than my neighbors, my neighbors more than strangers, and strangers more than my enemies. Consequently, I love the French more than the Europeans, and ultimately I love best of all, among the other countries of the world, those that are my allies and that love France.

Nothing is more regressive for civilization and socialization than to align oneself with a hierarchy of identities and memberships. To be sure, the assertion of an identity is always an attempt to counter the erasure of oppressed minorities, but it proceeds through an excess of self-centered claims, or even through a mad desire not to mix with any community but one's own. And as soon as one adopts this sort of hierarchical splintering of reality, one is condemned to invent new ostracisms with respect to those who are not included in one's immediate group. Far from being emancipatory, then, the process of identitarian reduction reconstructs what it claims to undo. How can we fail to think about the effeminate homosexual men who are rejected by those who are not effeminate? How can we fail to see that it is precisely the mechanism of identity assignment that leads Whites and Blacks to reject the mixed-race individuals derogatorily labeled "mulattos," and leads mixed-race individuals to lay claim to "the drop of blood" that would allow them to align themselves with one camp rather than another? Similarly, it leads Sephardics to discriminate against Ashkenazis, who for their part are anti-Sephardic; it leads Arabs to excoriate Blacks and vice versa; it leads Jews to become anti-Semites, sometimes owing to Jewish self-hatred and sometimes, more recently, owing to adherence to the nationalist politics of the Israeli far right. At the heart of any identitarian system, there is always the accursed place of the other, irreducible to any

label, in which one is condemned to feel ashamed of being oneself.

The politics of Narcissus

To understand the blossoming of the identitarian anxieties that have ended up reversing the ideal of struggles for freedom into its opposite, we need to go back to the emergence of what Christopher Lasch called the culture of narcissism.[11] In 1979, Lasch noted that mass culture as it had developed in American society had engendered pathologies that could not be eradicated. And he attributed to post-Freudian psychoanalysis the responsibility for having validated that culture by transforming modern subjects into victims of themselves, interested only in navel-gazing. By dint of an exclusive preoccupation with their own identitarian anxieties, subjects in the individualist American society had become slaves to a new dependency of which the tragic fate of Narcissus – much more than that of Oedipus – was the embodiment. In Greek mythology, Narcissus, fascinated by his own reflection, falls into the water and drowns because he has not managed to understand that his image is not himself. In other words, it is because he does not grasp the idea of difference between himself and otherness that he condemns himself to death. He has become dependent on a fatal identitarian anchoring that leads him to need others in order to have self-esteem, while remaining unable to conceive what authentic otherness might be.

The other is thus assimilated to an enemy, and his or her difference is denied. Since no conflictual dynamic is acknowledged, all subjects take refuge in their own little territories in order to make war on their enemies. Obsessing over one’s body, acquiring a good self-image, affirming one’s desires without feeling any guilt, desiring

fascism or puritanism – activities such as these would determine the beliefs of a society at once depressive and narcissistic, whose new religion would declare faith in a therapy of the soul founded on the cult of an inflated ego.

In an essay published five years later, Lasch stressed that, in a troubled period such as the 1980s, daily life in America had turned into an exercise in survival: “People take one day at a time. They seldom look back, lest they succumb to a debilitating ‘nostalgia’; and if they look ahead, it is to see how they can insure themselves against the disasters almost everyone now expects … Under siege, the self contracts to a defensive core, armed against adversity. Emotional equilibrium demands a minimal self, not the imperial self of yesteryear.”[12]

Lasch had the great merit of drawing attention to the emergence of a huge fantasy of identity loss. In a world recently unified and lacking an external enemy – from the political disengagement of the 1980s to the fall of the Berlin Wall – all individuals could believe themselves personally to be victims of some ecological disaster, some nuclear accident, some network, or more simply of their neighbors: transgendered, postcolonialist, Black, Jew, Arab, sexist, rapist, zombie. The list is endless: the phenomenon has continued to grow in the early twenty-first century, as if self-preservation should be the goal of every struggle.

Berkeley 1996

In the years that followed the fall of the Wall, the culture of identity gradually took over from the culture of narcissism, and in the fluid world we currently inhabit, it has become one of the responses to the weakening of the collective ideal, to the collapse of the ideals of the French Revolution, and to the transformations of family structures. It was

during those years, then, that the so-called “societal” struggles could be said to have taken the place of social struggles. The culture of identity tends to introduce its procedures of thought into the experiences of social or sexual subjective life. And from that standpoint, all behavior becomes identitarian: ways of eating, making love, sleeping, driving a car. Every neurosis, every particularity, every item of clothing refers to an attribution of identity, according to the generalized principle of conflict between oneself and the others.

I became aware of this in September 1996 during a stint in Berkeley, California – a laboratory of all the avant-garde theories. I had been invited by my friend Vincent Kaufmann, a professor of literature, who lived on campus with his family. I was astonished to discover that he was unable to bring the faculty members of his department together for a joyous, convivial banquet. They each brandished their own lifestyles like a fetish: one was a vegetarian and had to bring his own food; another suffered from horrible allergies that kept him from spending a whole evening in the company of particles deemed dangerous for his health; a third obeyed daily sleep rituals that required him to go to bed at 9 p.m. and thus to arrive for the dinner at 6; a fourth was, on the contrary, an insomniac who could not tolerate eating before 10 p.m.; yet another could not bear the idea that cheese could be served at a meal; not to mention those who were exasperated by the noise likely to be made by young children … In short, all of Kaufmann’s colleagues were prepared to come at the time of their choosing and provided that they could bring their own food and drink. In other respects, they were all delightful, intelligent, refined, highly cultured. All practiced the hospitality that only American intellectuals know how to offer.

That day, I could not help thinking of Michel Foucault's reflection upon arriving at the University of Vincennes in 1969:

It was hard to say anything at all without someone asking you: "You're speaking from where?" That question always left me very dejected. It seemed to me a question befitting a police interrogation. In the guise of a theoretical and political question ("Where are you speaking from?"), in fact I was being asked about my identity: "At bottom, who are you?" "So tell us if you are a Marxist or not." "Tell us if you are an idealist or a materialist." "Tell us if you're a professor or a militant." "Show your I.D, tell us in the name of what you're going to be able to circulate so that we can tell who you are."[13]

I understand, then, why Mark Lilla, a militant on the American left and professor of humanities at Columbia University, could react with genuine outrage in 2017 when he came across yet another instance of the ravages of identity politics:

On the [Democratic Party's] homepage, … you find a list of links titled "People." And each link takes you to a page tailored to appeal to a distinct group and identity: women, Hispanics, "ethnic Americans," the LGBT community, Native Americans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders … There are seventeen such groups, and seventeen separate messages. You might well think that, by some mistake, you have landed on the website of the Lebanese government.[14]

Notes

1 See the proceedings in Chawki Azouri and Élisabeth Roudinesco, eds., *La psychanalyse dans le monde arabe et islamique* (Beirut: Presses de l'université Saint-Joseph,

2005). The participants included Souad Ayada, Jalil Bennani, Fethi Benslama, Antoine Courban, Sophie Bessis, Christian Jambet, Paul Lacaze, and Anissé el-Amine Merhi.

2 The French concept of *laïcité*, or secularism, is a constitutional principle ensuring the separation of public institutions from the influence of religious organizations, most notably the Catholic Church. – *Translator's note*.

3 Cf. article 1 of the Constitution of October 4, 1958: "France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. It shall respect all beliefs. It shall be organized on a decentralized basis. Statutes shall promote equal access by women to elective offices and posts as well as to position[s] of professional and social responsibility." https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/France_2008.pdf?lang=en.

4 Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France*, trans. Siân Reynolds, vol. 1 (Paris: Flammarion, [1986] 1992), p. 15.

5 Of these communities, 12 are Christian (Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Jacobite, Chaldean, Nestorian, Latin, Protestant, and Copt). Of the five other communities, one is Israelite and four are Muslim (Sunni, Shia, Druze, and Alawite). See Fredrik Barth, "Les groupes ethniques et leurs frontières," in Philippe Poutignat and Jacelyne Streiff-Fenart, *Théories de l'ethnicité* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995), pp. 203–49.

6 On this issue, see Catherine Kintzler, *Penser la laïcité* (Paris: Minerve, 2014).

7 Élisabeth Roudinesco, “Le foulard à l’école, étouffoir de l’altérité,” *Libération*, May 27, 2003. I testified in favor of the law before a commission convoked in July 2003 by Bernard Stasi. I also spoke out in favor of prohibiting niqabs in public spaces, because the existence of democratic freedoms presupposes that subjects do not conceal their faces and that they can be identified for what they are.

8 Sélim Abou, *La “République” jésuite des Guaranis (1609–1768) et son héritage* (Paris: Perrin/Unesco, 1995), and *De l’identité et du sens: La mondialisation de l’angoisse identitaire et sa signification plurielle* (Paris and Beirut: Perrin/Presses de l’université Saint-Joseph, 2009). Roland Joffé, in his 1986 film *The Mission*, did an excellent job of retracing the history of the fight of the Jesuits and the Guanari people of Paraguay against Spanish and Portuguese colonialism. Abou restated Tocqueville’s famous paradox according to which the more a situation improves, the more the gap between the current situation and the ideal is felt subjectively as intolerable by the very people who benefit from the improvement. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, vol. 2 (New York: Library of America, [1840] 2004), book 2, chapter 13.

9 I examined this issue in *La famille en désordre* (Paris: Fayard, 2002).

10 Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *Mes pensées*, anthology established by Catherine Volpilhac-Auger (Paris: Gallimard, 2014). Abou’s citation combines *pensées* (thoughts) 350 (p. 143) and 741 (p. 153).

11 Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979). A bestseller in the United States, the

book was greeted in France as a critique of left-wing progressivism.

12 Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), p. 15.

13 Michel Foucault, “Je suis un artificier,” in Roger-Pol Droit, *Michel Foucault: Entretiens* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004), pp. 111–12. The interview by Roger-Pol Droit was recorded in June 1975. For the transcript, see https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.entretien1975.fr/.

14 Mark Lilla, *The Once and Future Liberal* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), pp. 11–12.

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THE GALAXY OF GENDER

Paris 1949: One is not born a woman

“One is not born, but rather becomes, woman.”[1] When she wrote that sentence in 1949 in *Le deuxième sexe* (*The Second Sex*), Simone de Beauvoir had no idea that the book would become a major work opening the way, on the other side of the Atlantic, to all the literary, sociological, and psychoanalytical works in the 1970s that sought to distinguish between sex (or the sexed body) and gender as an identitarian construct. From Robert Stoller to Heinz Kohut to Judith Butler, from the study of transsexualism to that of the narcissistic Self and then from transgender to queer, we find everywhere, even if it is not explicit, the great Beauvoirian interrogation that made it permissible, for the first time, to cast a new gaze on the status of all the differences repressed by official history, and among those the most scandalous, that of “becoming a woman.”[2]

The Second Sex provoked a scandal from the moment it was published, as if the work had come straight out of the “forbidden books” section of the French National Library (popularly known as “Hell”). And yet it resembled neither a story by the Marquis de Sade nor a pornographic text nor a treatise on eroticism. Simone de Beauvoir brought to her study of sexuality the approach of a scientist, a historian, a sociologist, an anthropologist, and a philosopher, basing her investigation on both Alfred Kinsey’s survey[3] and the works of an impressive number of psychoanalysts, while taking into account not only the biological, social, and psychic reality of female sexuality but also the foundational

myths about the difference between the sexes (myths conceived by men and by women) along with the domain of private life. She was speaking, then, about sexuality, and more specifically about female sexuality, in all its forms and in its smallest details.

Suddenly, the female sex erupted in a new and paradigmatic way into the field of thought: henceforth people would refer to *The Second Sex* the way they referred to Descartes's *Discourse on Method*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, or Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. And this magnificent book would serve as the basis for an in-depth renovation of feminist thought. Going forward, fighting for social and political equality was no longer enough. It would also be necessary to take women's sexuality into account, as an object of anthropology and as lived experience.

Simone de Beauvoir did not conceptualize the notion of gender, and she was unaware that societies had always classified sexuality variously as a function of anatomy or of identity construction. As Thomas Laqueur makes clear, in all earlier discourses about sexuality, the two notions were never conflated. Some authors asserted, as we find from Aristotle to Galen, that gender dominated sex, to the extent that men and women could be ranked according to their degree of metaphysical perfection, along an axis in which men occupied the sovereign position; other writers, as we see in the nineteenth century, asserted to the contrary that sex in the anatomical and biological sense defined gender: monism on one side (one sex was the standard), dualism on the other (there were two sexes, distinguished by anatomical differences). In both cases, masculinity was always thought to be superior to femininity: in short, phallocentrism reigned.[4]

As for the Freudian theory of sexuality, it represents a synthesis between the two models. In fact, Freud drew