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### Symposium Introduction: Blood: A critique of Christianity by Gil Anidjar

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## Symposium Introduction: Blood: A critique of Christianity by Gil Anidjar

Justin K. H. Tse

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“Have I not called this a book? Is it not one after all?”

Gil Anidjar’s *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* may well be a book, but Anidjar wishes that it wasn’t: “Instead, one could imagine the whole thing as restless and otherwise bound, neither new science nor archaeology, but rather partaking of a different, older tradition of *disputation*” (xi). The disputation is alive, and dispute it certainly does, with references to critical theory and historical texts circulating as though the book (or rather, the “disputation”) were a capillary system rushing with blood. Here’s what Anidjar disputes, “blatantly plagiarized” (he admits) “from Carl Schmitt”:

*All significant concepts of the history of the modern world are liquidated theological concepts. This is not only because of their historical development—in which they circulated between theology and the operations of the modern world, whereby, for example, the blood of Christ became the flow of capital—but also because of their systematic fluidity, the recognition of which is necessary for a political consideration of these concepts.* (viii).

The liquidation of theology, Anidjar contends, is not a concept. This is not a disputation about ideas. It is about how this material liquid called blood generates the modern politics of war, economy, and psychoanalytic introspection. It is a dispute dripping with blood.

Blood, after all, is not an idea. Blood is a material, bodily liquid. Blood literally, physically, materially courses through the Christian West, including its secular guises. “The reading I offer, the argument I ultimately propose,” Anidjar declares, “is that between presence and absence, blood is the *element* of Christianity, its voluminous mark (citation, context)” (ix). From the outset, Anidjar suggests that the circulating, shedding, and obsessing over blood is uniquely Christian because it, frankly, does not work that way in Jewish thought, not even in the Bible. “There is,” Anidjar repeatedly reiterates, “a difference between bloods,” but this difference certainly has no precedent in the “flesh and bone” language of Hebrew Scripture (44–49) and doesn’t even have its roots in the New Testament, a text framed by the medical tradition of the Greeks and the Romans in which the significance of blood was debated (49–53). The notion that blood ties together communities of kinship and separates those communities from others originates in what Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac called the *corpus mysticum*, the “eucharistic matrix” that distinguishes a Christian people as different from other peoples because their political theology exalts the shed blood of the murdered Jesus Christ (53). Anyone who understands kinship in terms of blood, even Sephardic Jews in post-Inquisition Spain, bleeds into Christianity. The mythological mystical body bleeds into them, and if such a thing as “secularization” were to enter the discussion, it would be defined as the “(relative) autonomy of nation (or race) from religion, be it along temporal, existential, or simply analytical lines,” which does nothing to separate the “secular” from its eucharistic history (64). Adjudicating between these different national, racial, and religious bloods in turn is the “vampire state,” a bloodless apparatus that has its origins in the eleventh- and twelfth-century papal revolutions and manifests in the nineteenth-century American “one-drop” rule for African Americans. The vampire state feeds off these communities of blood, deriving its legitimacy over the body politic by claiming that it can unite the different bloods into a single ocean of blood. However, “economic theology,” the “history of blood and money,” that shows the spirit of capitalism for what it is demonstrates otherwise (141): as both Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* and Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* observe, the difference between bloods privileges Christian participation in financial circulation at the expense of Jews like Shylock. The coins in circulation are derived from

stamped communion wafers, the body politic is a blood cult from the Eucharist, so there cannot only be blood—there will be *bloods*.

To talk about the infusion of Christianity in the modern world is thus to discuss political hematologies. Anidjar gives us three.

- The first is that the difference between Christian and Jewish bloods raises a unique hematological question in the Western canon: can we speak of “Greek bloods”? In Anidjar’s analysis, the answer is yes; the problem is that Greek blood from Homer to Aristotle is not about kinship in the Eucharistic Christian sense, but about food eaten by the gods, the dead, the living.
- A second hematological issue is Freudian, mulling over the collective melancholia of the modern unconscious and discovering that the possibilities for the phantasmagorical emergence of the vampire have to be Christian. Indeed, the vampire is us in postcolonial melancholy still attending to the wounds of Christ who was killed (as Freud claims we remember) by those of a different blood. The West stewes over the irony that having derived its founding mythology from having blood shed, it has in turn shed blood in colonial conquest.
- This brings Anidjar to his third hematology: an examination of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* as a race science of Christian blood, one that rightly recognizes the Leviathan, the whale, as the blood-pumping heart of the modern body politic, whether American or not. That much of this is unconscious, Anidjar provocatively concludes, suggests that despite Freud’s Jewishness, his obsession with the founding murders of modernity makes him a Christian, part of the collective unconscious through which these bloods still flow. *Blood* is thus a critique of Christianity, raising the “Christian question” instead of Marx’s “Jewish Question” to get at the blood that continues to infuse and infest the contemporary world.

If this is a disputation, then Anidjar is in good company in this forum. He may have gotten his wish, for the four panelists have submitted four responses in four academic genres. We begin with Brittany Pfeiffer Noble, who takes Anidjar to an “author meets the critics” session of sorts, probing whether Anidjar in fact can make his connections between Christianity and blood. We turn then to Bettina Bildhauer’s comparison of Anidjar to filmmaker Quentin Tarantino to account for Anidjar coursing from blood fact to blood fact. This is followed by Eugene Rogers, who shows us publicly what peer reviews often circulated privately look like, and this is quite the example, for this peer reviewer calls Anidjar’s disputation not so much a book, but an opera. Finally, John Lardas Modern rounds out the historical account that Anidjar provocatively traces, confirming Anidjar’s reading of the blood-pump in *Moby-Dick* not only with scenes from the book and analysis from critic C.L.R. James, but clips from YouTube as well. Think of Anidjar as having thrown down the hematological gauntlet, calling forth a symposium that is not simply about ideas. “Academic scholarship, the would-be lifeblood of the American mind,” he claims, “must not be left out of this all-too rapid survey” (105). Because it has not been, we can expect indeed that there will be bloods.

UPDATE: The original introduction referred to the “one-drop” rule as referring to Native Americans. It referred to African Americans. The error has been corrected.