

NOTES

CHAPTER 1

1. Two significant exceptions are Werner Hamacher's "Lingua Amissa: The Messianism of Commodity Language and Derrida's *Specters of Marx*" and Aijaz Ahmad's "Reconciling Derrida: 'Specters of Marx' and Deconstructive Politics" although neither link this question to Derrida's African heritage or political commitments.
2. The term "performativity" is discussed in Derrida's "Marx & Sons"; also, see Werner Hamacher's "Lingua Amissa."
3. See, for instance, the interview "Bonding in Difference" in *Spivak Reader*.
4. Nations listed were as follows: "China, Russia, Armenia, Poland, Romania, Mexico, Germany, France, the United States, and elsewhere" (*Specters of Marx* ix).
5. In opposition to Handleman, it must be said that Zeus, not Moses, seems to be the more fundamental target for Derrida.
6. See Pacéré's "Saglego: or Drum Poem (For the Sahel)."
7. See Rouch's *La religion et la magie Songhay*; Stoller's *Embodying Colonial Memories, The Taste of Things Ethnographic, and Sensuous Scholarship*; and Hale's *Scribe, Griot, Novelist*.

CHAPTER 2

1. It is worth noting that, since Vatican II, Catholic women are also no longer required to wear a veil during mass.

CHAPTER 3

1. Evelyn Shakir, in her book *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (1997), probes this question in her chapter entitled "Color and Religion." "Arab Americans come in a range of colors," Shakir states. "Some are nearly as dark as sub-Saharan Africans, a few are blond and blue-eyed, most—eyes brown, hair dark, skin tending to olive—occupy that middle ground shared by other Mediterranean peoples" (112). In the United States especially, those Arabs who have a "wheaty" phenotype often find it far more difficult to assimilate into American culture, regardless of their religion. A

wheaty phenotype can be a marker of difference that dramatically affects the lives of “Arab” Jews, Christians, and Muslims, a fact that is too seldom acknowledged in the Levantine setting. As Shakir points out, “Dark pigmentation and, especially, dark body hair have traditionally been sources of shame to girls [and boys] growing up in the United States” (112).

2. In this case, Derrida speaks specifically of his love for “pure French” and his lifelong embarrassment over his latent “southern” or “French Algerian” accent. He acknowledges that he is “not proud” of his love for, what he calls, “pure” French, but he acknowledges in this case his embarrassment of his African origins. “It is the only impure ‘purity’ for which I dare confess a taste. It is a pronounced taste for a certain pronunciation. I have never ceased learning, especially when teaching, to speak softly, a difficult task for a ‘pied noir’ . . .” (*Monolingualism of the Other* 47).
3. I heard Derrida make this statement during a course he taught at the University of California, Irvine in Spring 1992, entitled *The Rhetoric of Cannibalism*. I have not been able to locate an exact written equivalent in his various writings.
4. See Hegel’s *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings* (New York: Harper & Row Cloister Books, 1961). Also see Derrida’s *Glas* and Captuo’s “Hegel and the Jews” in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (230–243).
5. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud comments that Jewish circumcision was a “particularly clumsy invention” because it was a rite already in use by millions of Egyptians (54). Freud states: “The fact that circumcision was native to the Egyptians could not possibly have been unknown to the Israelites who created the text of the Bible” (54).
6. See Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* (1958).
7. The obvious exception is the minority Shia sect (about 20 percent of the global Muslim population), which affirms the elected blood lineage of the Mahdi, who will come from the ancestors of Ali and Fatima (the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad).
8. It is worth noting that the Talmud also refers to Alexander the Great. This reference is cited and discussed in some detail in Emanuel Rice’s *Freud and Moses* (18–20).
9. As the anonymous author of the “Manifesto of the Arab Nationalists” wrote in 1932, “Unite then and help one another, and do not say, O ye Muslims: This is a Christian, and this is a Jew, for you are all God’s dependents, and religion is for God alone . . . O ye Christians and Jewish Arabs combine with your brethren the Muslim Arabs” (“Announcement to the Arabs” 83–88).
10. One of the most beloved and widely quoted passages of Sufi literature is Ibn ‘Arabi’s poem “Bewilderment, Love, Madness,” which

reads: “I profess the religion of love; / Wherever its caravan turns along the way, / that is the belief, / the faith I keep.”

11. It is inconceivable that Derrida could have been unaware that Said wrote extensively on Massignon: in fact, Derrida’s lectures on Massignon were delivered in the U.S. university, where Said was a figure of major importance in critical theory.
12. However, many of the Tuareg in the region of the Sahel where Foucauld lived were not Muslim. The Tuareg have increasingly converted to Islam in the last century although a significant number still view Arab Islam as an imperializing force, much like French Catholicism.
13. The spectacular failures of Arab nationalism, especially its Ba’athist articulation, are discussed in my essay “Introduction: Arabism Now,” in *Whither Arabism?* Edited by Christopher Wise and Paul James (forthcoming).

CHAPTER 5

1. Judaism also affirms figurative interpretation of the heart’s circumcision. When the human heart becomes hardened, as in the case of the Pharaoh in Exodus, God is implored to “circumcise” or remove the outward shell of the heart of the believer.
2. Richard Popkin and David Katz trace the fascinating history of Messianism in American culture in their *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium* (1998). Popkin and Katz’s study implies the need for further comparative analysis of Messianism in the Occupied Territories and the United States. It also may place Derrida in a kind of unexpected trajectory with figures like Rabbi Kook, David Koresh, Joseph Smith, and Timothy McVeigh.
3. Christians are similarly charged with altering the revealed teachings of “The Prophet Jesus.” For instance, when Jesus promises that a “comforter” will be sent in his wake, Muslims believe that Christians either altered or misconstrued his original meaning. This belief is held because the Aramaic word for “Paraclete”—understood by Christians to mean the “Holy Spirit”—is “Ahmed,” which is one of the names of Muhammad. The Islamic view generally accords with the critique of the Trinity that pervades the teachings of the Quran.

CHAPTER 7

1. In his *Moses the Egyptian* (1997), Jan Assman states, “I find the emphasis which Yerushalmi and others have recently laid on Freud’s Jewishness somewhat distorting with regard to his position as he constructs it in *Moses and Monotheism*. As far as *Moses and Monotheism* is

- concerned, I agree with Peter Gay in seeing Freud more on the side of the *philosophes* than that of the Rabbis” (253).
2. Freud is probably responding to Alan Gardiner’s landmark article, “The Egyptian Origin of the Semitic Alphabet,” published in 1916, documenting the discovery of the Proto-Sinaitic alphabet, which arguably established a direct link between alphabetic forms of writing in Egypt and more abstract forms of alphabetic literacy that developed in various “Phoenician” locales. Debate about Freud’s positing of an Egyptian identity to Moses have obscured the fact that he implies that Jewish peoples, under the leadership of Moses, were the inventors of alphabetic literacy, or at least the less representational form of the alphabetic literacy that developed outside of Egypt.
 3. Said devoted a great deal of attention to Adorno in his later writings, especially Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* (1997). In opposition to the Heideggerian deconstruction of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, Adorno deliberately affirmed an Hegelian-Marxian concept of the subject as a persistent structure that could be sublated, but not dissolved. For more in this regard, see especially Adorno’s essay “Subject and Object” in *The Frankfurt School Reader* (497–511).

CHAPTER 8

1. Leibniz, *The Monadology*, trans. R. Latta, 1951: “The Principle of Sufficient Reason in virtue of which we hold that there can be no fact real or existing, no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason why it should be so and not otherwise, although these reasons usually cannot be known by us” (236).
2. Jacqueline Rose among others has critiqued Derrida’s evocation of the feminine as a means of describing this “outside”; Spivak has, however, offered a persuasive defense of Derrida in this regard, while agreeing with some aspects of Rose’s critique (in fact, Rose’s own critique is based, to some extent, on Spivak’s own views). See “Feminism and Deconstruction” in Spivak’s *Outside in the Teaching Machine* and Rose’s *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986).
3. See John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (London and New York: Penguin: 1972).
4. See Christopher Wise, “The Actuality of Frantz Fanon: Critical Fanonism, Thomas Sankara, and Islamic ‘Resurgence,’” in *Arena Journal*, No. 12 (1998): 129–142.
5. The most notable response came in James Clifford’s chapter “On Orientalism” in *Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988: 255–276.
6. My formulation is, to some extent, a deliberate oversimplification of Spivak’s views, for she also encourages her students to ask not only “who has power in the order of marginality . . . and who is deprived of it . . . But to look rather for the pattern of the modifications which the

relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process” (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 59).

7. See Fanon’s often-cited reception of this text in *Black Skin, White Masks* (132–134).
8. The “law” that Derrida calls *ananke* or Necessity, and that Spivak refers to as “that which we cannot *not* desire” is obviously subject to the criticism that Derridean deconstruction, like Marxism with its theory of the base-superstructure, may finally offer a kind of economic determinism. Derrida himself would like to suggest that his own view, unlike Marx’s in some places, generally escapes becoming a form of idealism, a view that most of his Marxist critics do not accept. In her essay “Ghostwriting,” Spivak states that she does not find Derrida’s view that Marx was a “closet idealist” to be convincing; but this is an oversimplification of Derrida’s criticisms of Marx (hence, Derrida’s irritation with Spivak’s response to *Specters of Marx*). Both Marx’s concept of the economic base and Derrida’s statements about *ananke* are articulated within a Greek philosophical tradition, which implies that their writings are in some sense dependent upon the same idealism from which they seek to disassociate themselves. As Jameson might put it, this is the sense in which history itself will extract its vengeance upon all those who imagine that they may completely break with it.

CHAPTER 9

1. Derrida himself states, “we have deliberately refrained from recourse to ‘illustrations’ to ‘actualize’ our analyses or in an attempt to demonstrate their necessity today, by delving into the most spectacular ‘news’ on political scenes: local, national, European, or worldwide. We have done so through a concern with sobriety: first, we do not want to exploit that which, as it were, screens out reflection by projecting itself with the pathetic and ‘sensational’ violence of images on to a too easily mediatizable scene. Then again, these examples are in the mind, heart, and imagination of anyone who would be interested in the problems we are dealing with here; such people, let us hope, will have found the path of these mediations by themselves. Lastly, the overabundance of such ‘illustrations’ would have swamped the least of our sentences . . .” (*Politics of Friendship* 272).
2. Chomsky asserts that, “just from the conditions of moral judgment, I don’t see how it can fail to be true that moral values are basically rooted in our nature—I think that must be true . . . [A] serious proposal for such a [moral] system, I think, would be that it might be something like what we know about language—and a lot is known. For example, there is a framework of basic, fundamental principles of language that are invariant in the species, they’re just fixed in our biological nature somehow—they hold for all languages, and they allow

for only a very limited degree of modification, which comes from early experience. Then as soon as those wired-in options for variation are fixed, children have a whole linguistic system which allows them to say new things... [W]e really don't know what the fundamental principles of moral judgment actually *are*, but we have very good reason to believe they're *there* [Chomsky's emphasis]" (*Understanding Power* 359–360).

3. "Whenever I hear a four-syllable word I get skeptical," Chomsky states, "because I want to make sure you can say it in monosyllables... But when I read, you know, Derrida, or Lacan, or Althusser, or any of these—I just don't understand it. It's like words passing in front of my eyes: I can't follow the arguments..." (*Understanding Power* 229–231).
4. Freud quickly dismisses the notion that incest dread developed in human society because the "primitive races very soon observe[d] the dangers with which inbreeding threatened their race" (*Totem and Taboo* 161). Instead, Freud argues that, "the harmful consequences of inbreeding are not established beyond all doubt even today and in man they can only be shown with difficulty" (161).
5. Schmitt's critique of pacifism echoes his critique of Marxist-Leninism: "Nothing can escape the logic of the political," he states. "If pacifist hostility toward war were so strong as to drive pacifists into a war against nonpacifists, in a war against war, that would prove that pacifism truly possesses political energy because it is sufficiently strong to group men according to friend and enemy. If, in fact, the will to abolish war is so strong that it no longer shuns war, then it has become a political motive..." (*The Concept of the Political* 36).
6. For instance, on April 18, 2006, Bush stated, regarding the future tenure of embattled Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld: "I listen to all voices, but mine is the final decision. And Don Rumsfeld is doing a fine job. He's not only transforming the military, he's fighting a war on terror. He's helping us fight a war on terror. I have strong confidence in Don Rumsfeld. I hear the voices, and I read the front page, and I know the speculation. But I'm the decider, and I decide what is best." Bush made similar statements with regard to his role in escalating troop involvement in the war in Iraq in fall 2007.
7. In a letter written by Heidegger to Schmitt, whom Heidegger recruited to teach at the University of Freiburg, Heidegger appreciatively cites Schmitt's use of Heraclitus's Fragment 53, "War is the father of all things, the king of all things. Some he proves to be gods, others men; some he makes slaves, others free" (see "Heidegger and Schmitt: The Bottom Line" 153).
8. Also, see Derrida's *Ear of the Other* (115–116).
9. Derrida's choice of the term "laic subjectivity" is certainly curious. The word "laic" comes from the Latin *laicus* and Greek *laiko*, meaning "of the people." In the Christian West, it is of course opposed to

the word “clergy,” or one who has taken holy orders. It should be noted that, within the Islamic context, where there are no actual clergy, the concept of the laic is certainly problematic. In fact, despite his insistence that the term “secularity” is a religious terms, which is why he assiduously avoids it, Derrida would probably have done better to use the term “secular” in this context, which is less obviously Christian than the term laic.

CHAPTER 10

1. Gadamer states, “In general, I do not hold etymologies to be of such great importance. Neither Heidegger nor Derrida has yet succeed in convincing me that an etymology can tell us something important if what is uncovered does not somehow continue to speak to us in the living language of today. This is the case even if the etymology is correct, whatever ‘correct’ may mean in this context” (“Dialogues in Capri” 200–201).
2. In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida states, “In a sense, nothing is untranslatable; but *in another sense*, everything is untranslatable; translation is another word for the impossible [Derrida’s emphasis]” (56–57).
3. In another passage that is unusual enough to merit citation, Caputo interprets Isaiah 29:14; “Therefore I will again deal with this people in surprising and wondrous fashion: The wisdom of the wise men shall perish and the understanding of its prudent men be hid” as “I will deconstruct the metaphysics of presence of the strong onto-theologians, sayeth the Lord God” (*The Weakness of God* 47–48).
4. In effect, Derrida suggests that Heidegger is unconsciously Christian, for instance, citing an early letter of Heidegger’s, written in 1921, where Heidegger states: “I am a ‘Christian theologian’” (*Acts of Religion* 94). The implication is that Heidegger, like Derrida, has his own “secret” religious faith, which Derrida wishes to reveal. Derrida qualifies his suggestion by stating that “[Heidegger’s] declaration would merit extended interpretation and certainly does not amount to a simple declaration of faith” (94). However, Derrida states that it doesn’t exclude this possibility either. To put it crudely, Derrida wants to suggest that Heidegger is a Christian version of himself. This is probably why Derrida is troubled when Heidegger asserts that “belief *in general* has no place in the experience or the act of thinking *in general* [Derrida’s emphasis]” (95). Derrida is alarmed at Heidegger’s refusal to affirm a transcendental theology of the pledge. Against Heidegger’s more agnostic refusal to explicitly affirm any particular Abrahamic religion, Derrida’s writings on the vow imply a specifically Jewish theology of the Abrahamic covenant, which Derrida wants his readers to understand is a matter of “universal” truth (rather than religious faith).

5. In *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (2005), Derrida makes this point most explicit when he states, “Heideggerian deconstruction (*Destruktion*) never really opposed logocentrism or even *logos*. Indeed it is often, on the contrary, in the name of a more ‘originary’ reinterpretation of *logos* that it carried out the deconstruction of classical ontology or ontotheology . . . I have recalled in several places that the theme and word *Destruktion* designated in Luther a desedimentation of instituted theology (one could also say ontotheology) in the service of a more originary truth of Scripture. Heidegger was obviously a great reader of Luther. But despite my enormous respect for this great tradition, the deconstruction that concerns me does not belong, in any way, and this is more than obvious, to the same filiation. It is precisely this difference that I attempt, although not without difficulty, to be sure, to articulate” (173–174).

CHAPTER II

1. The texts above in some sense form an arbitrary list, given the wealth of documents from the Sahel that one might cite, both from the early Islamic period (i.e., as far back as a thousand years ago) and the present, to which one might make reference in supporting the argument presented here. It is scandalous how little is known about the unread texts of Northwest Africa in Europe, the United States, the Arab world, and even across Africa itself. The work of restoring, cataloguing, and digitalizing the copious manuscripts of Timbuktu, Ouâdane, Chinguetti, Kano, Djenné, and other important archival sites has hardly begun, much less their translation into English, as well as annotation, and careful study. Some of these texts are written in Arabic, some in Ajami (an African language with an Arabic alphabet), and some are even written in European languages like Greek and Spanish. However, the *Tarikh al-Sudan* and *Tarikh al-fettâch* are texts that have been known in Europe for more than a hundred years now, although they have only recently been translated into the English language. John Hunwick recently translated the *Tarikh al-Sudan* into English; Hala Abu Taleb and I are also currently preparing an English language translation of *The Tarikh al-fêttach*. In the case of the Mande epic of the cultural hero Sundiata Keita, which is also well known outside the region, I refer readers to John Williams Johnson’s accessible transcription of Fa-Digi Sisòko’s version of the tale of the famous founder of the Mande empire. Thomas Hale also recently transcribed Nouhou Malio’s version of the Songhay epic of “Mamar Kassaye” under the title of *The Epic of Askiya Muhammad* (1996). Also see Hale’s comparative study *Scribe, Griot, Novelist* (1990), where this epic first appeared.
2. Scholars of Sahelian West Africa, from both inside and outside the region, have argued that the ancient culture of this region has remained

relatively unaffected by both French Catholic and Arab Islamic incursions in the region. For further information in this regard, see Thomas Hale and Paul Stoller's "Oral Art, Society, and Survival in the Sahel Zone"; Roderick J. and Susan McIntosh's "The Inland Niger Delta Before the Empire of Mali: Evidence from Jenne-Jeno" and "Finding Jenne-Jeno, West Africa's Oldest City"; and Joseph Paré and Christopher Wise's "Introduction: The Land of the Blood-Boiling Sun." While Hale and Stoller invoke the concept of "deep Sahelian culture" in discussing this ancient and non-Abrahamic culture, Paré and R.E.L.I.S. (Réseau d'Etudes Littéraires Sahéliennes, or Network for the Study of Sahelian Literatures) scholars have endorsed the concept of *sahelité* (or sahelity).

3. In *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, Caputo states as follows, "Nothing guarantees that an argument that appeals to us in no small part because it is impudent, unorthodox, and de-centering will not come undone from the sheer pressure of traditional scholarship. From what I can judge, the jury appears to be in and the verdict is bad for Bernal's delicious suggestion [that Athena was black] (it would have driven Heidegger over the edge!). Indeed, had Athena/Neith hailed from Egypt at all, as the myth at the beginning of the *Timaeus* suggests—which not a lot of scholars believe—she would be at best a little on the swarthy side, like St. Augustine, not a sub-Saharan Nubian" (88). The trial that Caputo stages in this footnote makes clear that he has not even bothered to read Bernal's study, even as he endorses the so-called verdict against Bernal. For instance, if he had, he would have known that Bernal himself was ambivalent about the title of his book, or that the question of Athena's "blackness" is not what is really at stake.
4. Thomas Hare's *Re-Membering Osiris* (1999) offers the first sustained critical effort to apply poststructuralist theory to ancient Egyptian forms of representation. As Hare points out, Egyptology as a discipline has not really assimilated the lessons of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida although Eric Hornung in particular has made some efforts in this direction, particularly in theorizing the problem of non-being in the thought of the ancient Egyptians (see Hornung's now classic text *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* [1982]). Note also that Geoff Bennington has posed the question of Derrida's possible "Egyptian" heritage in his playful essay "Mosaic Fragment: What if Derrida were an Egyptian..." (1994).
5. See Jan Assman's *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (96–97).
6. In West Africa today, it is considered a blessing to eat out of the same bowl as a devout marabout (or Muslim "holy man") as a means of gaining some his *barakah* from him. Johnson suggests that, in this context, the Islamic notion of *barakah* is interchangeable with the Mande word *nyama* (*The Epic of Son-Jara* 9).
7. The Quran evokes this miracle of Jesus to illustrate why the Prophet Muhammad refused to perform similar miracles. The Quran states that those who disbelieved in Jesus's prophet vocation asserted this

miracle was nothing “but plain sorcery.” This passage in the Quran is important, for it offers yet more evidence of the early Islamic rejection of Judaic, Egyptian, and other forms of pre-Abrahamic “magic.” As te Veldt points out, the Egyptian word *heka* also persists in the Egyptian Coptic version of the Book of Acts of the New Testament in reference to Simon Magnus, the sorcerer who sought to buy the gifts of the holy spirit with money in the mistaken belief that the apostles performed a new form of sorcery that he too wished to learn (Acts 8:11–12). See te Veldt (176).

8. For more in this regard, see my article “Nyama and Heka: African Concepts of the Word.”
9. Besides Al Hajj Mahmud Kâti’s *The Tarîkh al-fettâch*, the best available resource on this history is John Hunwick’s recent study *Jews of a Saharan Oasis*.
10. See Patrick R. McNaughton’s *The Mande Blacksmiths* (1988), Thomas Hale’s *Scribe, Griot, Novelist: Narrative Interpreters of the Songhay Empire* (1990) and *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (1998), Stephen Belcher’s *Epic Traditions of Africa* (1999), and Barbara G. Hoffman’s *Griots At War: Conflict, Conciliation, and Caste in Mande* (2001). One might also cite the work of anthropologists such as Marcel Griaule, Germaine Dieterlen, Jean Rouch, Paul Stoller, and others, all of whom have documented the vitality of occult religious systems in the Sahel today. Numerous West African writers have similarly attested to the persistence of ancient Sahelian beliefs about the word, such as Titinga Frederic Pacéré, Cheikh Anta Diop, El Hadj Sékou Tall, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Hawad, to cite only a few emblematic figures.
11. In both the *Tarîkh al-fettâch* and the *Epic of Askiya Muhammad*, the mother of the Askiya Muhammad is identified as Kassaye, who is also the central figure in Songhay sorcery religions of the Sahel. For further information regarding contemporary cult practices associated with Kassaye, see Paul Stoller and Cheryl Olkes’ *In Sorcery’s Shadow* (1987).
12. The most important site associated with sorcery practices among the Songhay of Gao is the Rose Dunes, the same island located not from the capitol where the Askiya Muhammad was banished for many years by the son who overthrew him.
13. See my discussion of Tidjaniya rites in “Yambo Ouologuem Among the Tidjaniya.”
14. One example is Father Joseph Henry, a nineteenth-century Catholic missionary, who described *nyama* as a kind of “Satanic fluid.” See Henry’s *L’âme d’un peuple africain: Les Bambara*, which was published in 1910. It goes without saying that Sahelian views of *nyama*, as true of ancient Egyptian views of *heka*, long predate the emergence of Satanism cults, which are historically linked to the Abrahamic religions.

15. Although Freud rejects Jung's hypothesis of the "collective unconscious," he nonetheless comes close to endorsing a concept of an "inborn mental residue of primeval times" in *Moses and Monotheism* (170). Freud's hypothesis in this regard is no more compelling than Jung's.
16. See Jameson's "The State of the Subject" (22).

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