



BASIA NIKIFOROVA

Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, Lietuva
Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, Lithuania

DERRIDA ŽYDIŠKUMAS: SAVO IR KITOS TAPATYBĖS DEKONSTRUKTORIUS

Derrida's Jewishness:
Deconstructor of Own and Other Identity

SUMMARY

Derrida's main source of creativity was "misreading" the philosophical and religious canon. Derrida, who is famous as a deconstructor of binary oppositions, feels himself beyond almost any binary opposition that he analyzed. Derridean researchers found an analogy between his types of liminality: the geographic or cultural outside space of the Marrano Jew and a philosophical position outside of both Athens and Jerusalem (Jewish and Greek traditions). He partly represents Marranos, who were expelled from the acculturated country but did not take a position in Jewish religion and existed at the margins of the host culture. Derrida was alienated from the place of his birth, native tongue and Jewish heritage. The aim of this article is to show how Derridean deconstruction destroys a hierarchy of identity and all subordinations between European and non-European identities.

SANTRAUKA

Vienas pagrindinių Derrida kūrybiškumo šaltinių buvo „neteisinga“ filosofinių ir religinių kanonų interpretacija. Derrida, kuris garsėjo binarinių opozicijų dekonstrukcija, jautėsi esąs anapus bet kurios analizuojamos binarinės opozicijos. Derrida kūrybos tyrinėtojai randa panašumų su jo paties tarpine (liminalia) būseną: maranų žydo geografiniu ar kultūriniu užribiu ir filosofine pozicija, esančia Jeruzalės ir Atėnų (žydų ir graikų tradicijų) užribyje. Iš dalies jis atstovauja maranams, išvarytiems iš akultūruotos šalies, tačiau neįsipareigojusiems žydų religijai ir gyvavusiems priėmusios kultūros paribyje. Derrida nutolo nuo gimtinės, gimtosios kalbos ir žydų paveldo. Šiame straipsnyje siekiama atskleisti, kaip Derrida dekonstrukcija suardo tapatybės hierarchiją bei visas europinės ir neeuropinių tapatybių subordinacijas.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: dekonstrukcija, Derrida, tremtis, tapatumas, ribiškumas, vienkalbystė.

KEY WORDS: deconstruction, Derrida, exile, identity, liminality, monolingualism.

The lesson of the Jew Greek remains:
the mongrels shall inherit the earth.

(Steven Kahhen 2013)

INTRODUCTION

About 70 years ago Spanish philosopher Jose Ferrater-Mora in the essay "In times like these: Wittgenstein, a Symbol of Troubled Times" wrote: "But my contention that Wittgenstein was a genius has a wider scope. It means that he was more than a philosophical genius. He was, in fact, a genius of our age, a symbol of troubled times. What it means to be genius "in time like this"? First, "those who know what the words "troubled times" mean does not know Wittgenstein; those who know Wittgenstein do not know what the words "troubled times" mean". Second, he was a "mystery man." Consequently, he was afraid of the world and all his life follows the motto: Live hidden! His most popular maxima: "Where of one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" has continuation in the words "Will to remain secret."

"Writing a biography means living through an intimate and sometimes intimidating adventure," writes Benoît Peeters, the author of Jacques Derrida's biography (Peeters 2013). The sheer difficulty of Derrida's writing contributed to its aura, but the main source of its creativity was "misreading" of the philosophical and religious canon. Same as Wittgenstein, Derrida was a famous system-destroyer, who used his texts to change the traditional philosophy by its own philosophical method and ideas. For him, "being a philosopher obviously involves more than merely doing philosophy, and

this extra feature... ontological supplement..., which opens the way for a philosopher to be the object of a biography. Only a philosopher who really is a philosopher will qualify for a biography". Such meanings or demands as "live hidden", "will to remain secret" were very important in Jacques Derrida's life and mostly were linked with his religious identity. The word secret means for him interiority that remains eternal incommensurable with exteriority. Oskar Baum, who directly corresponded with Kafka, analyzing his Jewish identity, underlined that Kafka is not a "Jewish writer" for the reason that his parents were Jews but primarily because of his alienation, hopelessness and fear, spiritual form of world tragic fixation. Partly these words are possible to say about Derrida but only partly. For him, "the secret as such separates and already institutes a negativity; it is a negation that denies itself. It denegates itself". During life, Derrida has many secrets; nevertheless, the important part of his personal secrets was connected with Jewish origin and later identity. Derrida's *galut* (exile) is his Jewishness as a private place outside of all discourse, which is inevitably ethnocentric. Derrida is alienated from the place of his birth, acculturation, including his only native tongue and Jewish heritage.

The methods of research include analyses of Derrida's philosophical works, some interviews and the works of re-

searchers that examine the case of Derrida's complicated identity, phenomenon of Other's liminality, the Marrano case and the phenomenon of "psychological

Jews" (Arendt H., Aschheim S. E., Bielik-Robson, A., Caputo, J. D., Kutash, Cixous, H., Thompson, A., Topolski, A. and Yerushalmi, Y. H.).

LIMINALITY AND THE MARRANO CASE

The term 'liminality' comes from the Latin word *limen*, threshold, and in our case, it means the disorientation between a previous way of understanding of an own identity and assumption of a new one. For Derrida as a postmodern philosopher, this term can be applied between two types of liminality: the geographic or cultural exteriority of the Marrano Jew and at the same time, his philosophical position that is outside both Jewish and Greek traditions. In fact, Derrida is outside of any binary opposition. Derrida is alienated both from the place of his birth and native culture, including his mother tongue, ethnic and religious Jewish heritage. Derrida's *galut* (exile) is neither Hebrew nor Greek; it is a secret place outside the margins of all discourses that are inevitably ethnocentric. Between liminality and the Marrano Jew there always was a common space and a close relationship, which concentrated on both psychological statuses. First, the disorientation between a previous identity and a new one, second, the historic, geographic cultural or linguistic exteriority of the Marrano Jew are a special case of liminality as such. In the liminal personality it is possible to find all symptoms of spiritual and social discomfort, which

includes ambivalence, because it does not fit into the framework of any classifications in a cultural space. Their ambivalent properties are expressed by a wide variety of symbols. In the state of psychological liminality, the feeling of the individual's identity turns out to be diffused. Their feelings to be fixed on certain mental images and contents: own and others. The person mostly is involved in an area that he/she cannot control and the cognitive and behavioral cases, which he/she does not recognize as "his/her own".

Hannah Arendt compared the famous European Jewish origin thinkers to the Marranos who were permitted to enter to the European intellectual circle under condition that they publicly refuse their Jewry. She wrote: "When it comes to claiming its own in the field of European arts and letters, the attitude of the Jewish people may best be described as one of reckless magnanimity. With a grand gesture and without a murmur of protest it has calmly allowed the credit for its great writers and artists to go to other peoples" (Arendt 1944: 90). The meaning of liminality and the Marrano for Derrida will be taken up here in three different contexts: language, archives and philosophical activity.

GREEKJEW – JEWGREEK

During his life Derrida was trying to answer the question: “Who am I?” This question had for him different levels of sense: personal, philosophical and political. In “Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida wrote that before philosophical deconstruction he should formulate the following important questions: Are we Greeks? Are we Jews? However, who, we? Are we... first Jews or first Greeks? “To what horizon of peace does the language, which asks this question, belong? Can it account for the historical coupling of Judaism and Hellenism? Moreover, what is the legitimacy, what is the meaning of the copula in this proposition? “Jewsgreek is Greekjew. Extremes meet?” (Derrida 1978). As Elizabeth J. Bellamy notices, Derrida’s “jewsgreek” knows neither temporality nor logic: the “jewsgreek” is not “chronological” but “pre-logical” (Bellamy 1997: 74).

From Derrida’s view, the “Jewish” cannot be conceived without the “Greek,” and vice versa. Nevertheless, Western European Jewry is a special kind of Jewish existence, which includes the “fragmentariness”, “tragic duality” and eternal attempt to struggle with that. Derrida highlights such features, which were inherited to “Greekjew-Jewgreek” mentality: universal form of Jewishness, which, in distinction to the “terminable Judaism” rabbinic tradition, not only a hope for the future”, but “the anticipation of a specific hope for the future” (Derrida 1996: 72). As noted above, Derrida was expelled from his original spiritual life and started to be alien at the country that accepted him. As mentioned

above, Derrida also is alienated from the place of his birth, the native language, the Western (Greek) philosophical tradition and his Jewish heritage. This situation gives him possibility to feel free to analyze and criticize the Western host culture, Algerian colonial and post-colonial situation and the Hebraic traditional archive. For philosophical research, Derrida chooses a place of exteriority, alterity or marginality. Derrida names himself, a man who has understood and own a “radical lack of culture from which I undoubtedly never completely emerged” (Derrida 1998: 53).

John D. Caputo in the introduction “A Passion for the Impossible” to the book “The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida...” in this way shortly described Derrida’s Jewishness. He cited his notebooks of 1976, in which Derrida described his broken covenant with Judaism that would “leave nothing, if possible, in the dark of what related me to Judaism, the alliance broken in every respect” (Caputo 1997: xvi), (Derrida 1993: 155–156).

For Derrida, his circumcision was the subject of preoccupation. He devotes to him not only his work “Circumfession”, which consists of 59 paragraphs, every of which correlated with his age at the time of writing and with many other texts.¹ Agata Bielik-Robson looks at Derrida and other “philosophical Marranos” as a person (philosopher, theologian, psychologist, artist and writer) who turned “the Jew Greek: Greek Jew” binary to his advantage” (Bielik-Robson 2004: 4).

Jewishness as something, which should not be confused with Judaism.

Thinking in Yerushalmi context, Derrida approves that contemporary Jewishness does not wait for the messianic future; it has “the opening relation to the future and the anticipation of a specific hope for the future” (Yerushalmi: 1991: 95). Yerushalmi described special type of Jewishness as the “psychological Jews” who emanated in pure subjectivity. In his opinion, this kind of Jewishness has following characters: the alienation from classical Jewish texts, the emphasis on inalienable Jewish traits such as intellectuality and independence of mind, the highest ethical and moral standards, concern for social justice, tenacity in the face of persecution. From the first view, words “psychological Jews” is close to the meaning “the fallen Jews”. Nevertheless, the Marrano Jew was only partially and forcefully separated from the Judaism, which he secretly continued practicing. From the Emilie Kutash view, the case of Derrida was another, it was a “converso case” in which he is “doubly liminal” according to the both archives important for him. The Derrida’s philosophical archive, which he obtained from his philosophical community, was not reconcilable with the ancestral heritage: he spoke different languages.

Yerushalmi was interesting for Derrida since he “explored the limits and possibilities in the tension between the biblical injunction to remember and the historiographical imperative to reconstruct profane human history” (Aschheim 2014). Moreover, the Jewish modern historians and Yerushalmi first mostly try to find and explain not only a new Jewish identity but also the tran-

scendental meaning of history. Yerushalmi explains the Jewish impact on history: “If Herodotus was the father of history, the fathers of meaning in history were the Jews” (Yerushalmi 2011: 201).

Greek descriptive vision of history was different from the biblical one, which includes a more transcendental dimension, but a biblical time with “meaning” in historical events, according to Yerushalmi, was stopped in the next major form of Judaism, the rabbinic (Yerushalmi 2011: 204). For Derrida it means new possibilities to make the first step to deconstruct religion through meaning of history.

Emilie Kutash found complicity of arguments, which explain Derrida’s gradual awareness of Jewishness as a part of his identity:

His discovery of his Jewish roots in texts such as *Circumfession* his exploration of the Akedah in *The Gift of Death*, his encomium to his father’s tallith, and his soul searching in *Abraham, the Other* all accrue meanings to his Judaism that go beyond Levinas. Derrida’s concern with forgiveness, friendship, and hospitality, his sensibility concerning Jewish particularity and universal justice, nationhood and violence catapult past doctrinal dogma, whether religious or philosophical. (Kutash 2014).

The traces of Jewishness are “his Jewish mother, the inscription upon him of his circumcision, and the anti-Semitism that came upon him from the outside are events that ‘write’ his Judaism on him” (Ibid). Next is his Jewish name, which it was given to him Elijah. These both gifts: circumcision and the naming, predate the signature with which he signs off on

his written corpus. Father tallith is another reliquary that connects Derrida with Jewishness. "The secret of the shawl envelopes one single body and 'my shawl' only by obeying Yahweh's order. And by beginning to wonder: who am I, I who have already said 'here I am'? What is the self?" (Derrida 2001: 337).

The Derrida's presence in the process of bordering Jewish identity opens the door to be a deconstructor, reconceptualizer and avant-gardener in every sphere of their activity. Derrida openly declared that he is "a sort of Marrano of French Catholic culture" (Derrida 1993:

170). He articulates this type of thinker, who "will never break through the Joycean 'jew-greek, greek-jew' confusion" (Ibid). For him it was a chance to get out from the circle of a self-enclosed identity. Leaving the ghetto with rigid cultural and religious identity, in which he actually never spiritually was, he got a modern philosophy offering him an opportunity of "free thinking". The deconstructed binary GreekJews open for Derrida a great possibility to touch a tradition in which Europe never figures as a geographic or political body but always is interpreted as something other.

DECONSTRUCTING EUROPEAN PARADIGM

Neither world fame nor high intellectualism remove for him the problem of *AlgerianFrenchJewish* origin. In "Circumfession" Derrida describes himself as "little black and very Arab Jew" (Derrida 1993: 58). He found out that in this sense one more important problem in Europe is a question of non-Europeans. For Derrida, Europe's origin is not identical to itself; it has the multiple sources of its identity, which include not only solely Greek heritage, but also Christian, Jewish, and Islamic elements too. Adding, that "the Greek never gathered himself or identified with himself" he includes such meanings as "secondary attributes" that are not something simply additional but are the organic part of special identity (the Christian, the Jew, the Arab, and so on) (Derrida 2010: 31). Starting from Derrida, the researchers of this problem connect meaning of European identity with understanding by what we are not. Traditionally to be "European" means

not to be Jewish or not to be Islamic.

According to Anya Topolski, there are some different ways in which the term 'Judeo-Christian' is being used in the European discourse today: as a synonym for secularism, an exclusionary of Islam, a form of Christian supersession by Jews, in terms of shared morals, a post-Holocaust apology rooted in guilt and as a synonym for faith. "By taking responsibility for the exclusionary violence which has its origins in endeavors to define European identity, there may be hope to create an inclusive community, a Europe 'to come', that is free from the specter of identity currently haunting Europe" (Topolski 2016: 268). In Derrida's opinion, it is impossible to construct European identity without rejection of exclusion. He combines the messianism of three Abrahamic religions with the Greek figure *epekeina tes ousias/then essentials* and creates an own partition inside 'Judeo-Christianity'. Derrida avoids

direct separation between Judaism and Christianity and shows that the heritage of the Judeo-Christian traditions is close to him. Nevertheless, he underlines that this process is more organic and dynamic for contemporary Christian theology than for Jewish. But at the same time, Judeo-Christianity has for Derrida a personal dimension, which is associated with the Marrano status as of a person who during his life had “pariah consciousness”, stayed in a guest-community formally, ritually, linguistically and religiously Other. For this reason, it is

not easy to be a Jew, a new Christian and a new Jew, a European and an Africans during one life; this is not a light task for a Philosopher.

Hybrid identity, one of the meanings that is partly associated with the Marrano case, voices a possibility to belong to both Greeks and Jews in the contemporary Europe. In this line stay such European values as solidarity, justice and hospitality. His words “I do not seek to establish any kind of authenticity” was his motto that he followed all his life (Derrida 1988: 55).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can affirm that Derridean deconstruction destroys a hierarchy of identity and all subordinations between Marrano and Litvak, Algerian and French, European and non-European identities. Derridean researchers identified an analogy between two types of liminality: the geographic or cultural outside space of the Marrano Jew who alienated from his/her original religion and who adopted a philosophical position outside both Athens and Jerusalem. He shows how identity is similarly established through acts of exclusion and marginalization but also that the marginalized characters are often central to the constituted identity. Introducing the concept of supplementarity, which often takes the form of an insignificant addition

to something external and excludes from its own nature, which turns to be an integral part of what it is excluded from.

Derrida many times emphasized that any cultural identity does not present itself as the opaque body, but is always universal in the singular and the unique testimony to the human essence. Derridean critique of the identity notion has been commonly interpreted as the rejection of the West’s homogenizing rationality. He applies deconstruction to the identity as such, not just to the particular identity of the West. Derrida’s words that he is “a sort of Marrano of French Catholic culture” help us better understand his deconstructed identity and own relations with both Jewish and Christian identities.

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