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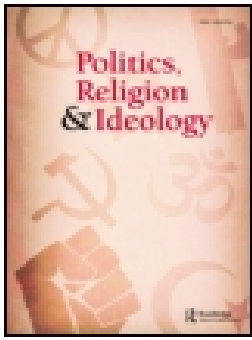
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BOOK REVIEW

Is Racism an Environmental Threat? by Ghassan Hage, Cambridge, UK and Malden, Mass, Polity Press, 2017, 145 pp., \$12.95 (hardback), \$12.95 (paperback), \$8.99 (E-book), ISBN 978-0-7456-9226

The Polity Press book series *Debating Race* has featured a number of important scholars of race and racism analyzing various aspects of race and racism past and present in a short and concise form. The fifth title to appear in this series, is Ghassan Hage's *Is racism an environmental threat?*

Hage is by no means a newcomer in this scholarly field. He established himself as an important anthropologist on current articulations and issues of racism in Australia and elsewhere with his monograph *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (2000). The short answer to the polemical question that Hage poses in his title is rather unsurprisingly 'yes.' Hage is admirably clear about his own positioning in this field as both scholar and activist, and argues that you cannot be an environmentalist and a racist. At the center of Hage's analysis is the function of the specter of 'the Muslim' in articulations of Islamophobia and colonial racism past and present. 'The most crucial component in the colonial imaginary of the Muslim other today' relates to 'his or her governability', according to Hage (p. 36). Those familiar with the present rhetorical tropes about Muslims in much of the Western world will be aware of the ubiquity of de-humanizing and racializing elements in those tropes. Hage rightly notes that racialized imagery varies from place to a place, is changeable and never absolute. 'The Muslim' is often analogized with 'cockroaches', but Hage argues that the analogization of 'the Muslim' (or 'the Arab') with a 'wolf' is on the rise (p. 33). Central to the politics of representing others is what Hage refers to as a 'polarity' between 'the racism of exploitation and the racism of extermination' (p. 31). Even though Hage admits that 'stereotypes of Muslims appeared well before the history of colonialism' (Hp. 28), he sees Islamophobia as a form of 'colonial racism' (p. 27). By this, he means to advocate the view that Islamophobic practices and conceptions of otherness have been molded by the history of colonialism and that they 'continue to function as a technique of governing racialized people in order to reproduce the basic colonial structure that still underlies a large part of the world even in this colonial age' (p. 27).

Hage's analysis is clearly influenced by Marxist perspectives. Hage's original move in this short monograph is to problematize – in a good anthropological form – the very tacit acceptance of the culture/nature/human/animal-binaries. As well as the acceptance that comes with the implicit devaluation of non-human lives undergirding many anti-racist and humanistic responses to the dehumanization of Muslims and other racialized minorities by means of animalistic metaphors. Hage insightfully notes, 'very rarely would we have an interaction where the racialized person questions the persistence of the metaphor directed at them and tells the racist, What's wrong with dogs or apes? They are better than humans in many regards' [sic] (p. 22). Hage takes issue with anthropologists, such as Pnina Werbner, who have advocated the view that Islamophobia is a form of prejudice distinct from racism; Hage argues what needs to be stressed is instead is 'how it is a distinct form of racism' premised on 'the inability of anti-Muslim racism to do its colonial job of governing its Muslim object.' (p. 50).

In Islamophobia, Hage sees the articulation of a historical transition from an earlier racism 'where the figure of the useful laborer or slave dominated' to 'current forms of neoliberal


racialization” on the “uselessness of the racialized to the racist’ (p. 48). When ‘Arabs’ and ‘Muslims’ are racialized as ever so much ‘waste’, the doors of logic of extermination are flung wide open. However, it should be obvious with the ecological crisis we face that : ‘the ecological crisis takes the form of a practical impasse of governmentality: we are at a loss as to what can be done’ (p. 50), and when Muslims qua ‘wolves’ or ‘cockroaches’ have come to embody the specter of the unruly and the ungovernable, it is a similar practical impasse of governmentality that has come to haunt us.

Hage has written a rich and profoundly thought-provoking and original monograph on the intertwining of anti-racism and environmentalism. This is obviously not ‘grounded theory’, and as far as it can be ascertained never aspired to be that either. However, in spite of numerous references to empirical cases which serve to both illustrate and illuminate Hage’s points, one inevitably misses empirical detail and a richer ethnographic texture in the text. There is always and inevitably a violence in abstraction and theorizing. For example, there are very obviously many who would have analytical reservations about Hage’s insistence on the ‘fundamental unity of the struggle for ecological change and against colonial racism’ (p. 133). There are in fact some people who are inclined to racist logics on the basis that the world is in their view in an ecological crisis precisely due to overpopulation: Interestingly, the Norwegian right-wing extremist and racist Anders Behring Breivik do appear to have been quite concerned by the ecological crisis: as I have myself pointed out in *Anders Breivik And The Rise Of Islamophobia* (Bangstad 2014), Breivik sometimes read as something akin to a Zen Buddhist.

Hage ends his short monograph on a critical-anthropological note by recommending that anti-racists and environmentalists ‘aim for a recovery of the multiplicities of modes of inhabitation that capitalist modernity has excluded and marginalized’ (p. 116), in which ‘anthropological research has a particularly important role to play’ (p. 117). For according to Hage ‘critical anthropologists researching radically different cultural spaces did not merely aim to discover different modes of being, entitlement and enmeshment. They aimed to do so with a critical eye on their own culture, where invariably generalized domestication dominated’ (p. 117). In other words, Hage rephrases Marshall Sahlins’ ‘mutualist mode of existence’ in which ‘boundaries between self and other, human and animal, and so on, are far less absolute and even nonexistent, and where we experience an interpenetration between self and other’ (p. 119) that we may move forward. Additionally, the terms such as Muslims and Arabs are often used interchangeably in Hage’s account, a move which is understandable, given the short format, but still it is slightly reductionist; not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are always and inevitably racialized as Muslims. In spite of these minor reservations, Hage has written a monograph that is excellent for thinking with and against.

Reference

Bangstad, Sindre (2014). *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia*. London and New York: Zed Books.

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