

## **Special Issue: Politics of Dis-Enclosure - Explorations into Religion, Community and Violence, Inspired by the Works of Jean-Luc Nancy**

*Special Issue of Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation  
in Contemporary Society*

### *Questioning globalization*

In view of an ever-increasing globalization process in which people relate to an ever-increasing plurality of “others”, understanding what being in the world means seems to be one of the most urgent questions that contemporary thought has to deal with. This is all the more true if one takes into account the absence of stable foundations as well as future points of reference for the world. When confronted with an irrevocable loss of grounds and the by now all too palpable “end of progress”, how can humans’ life-worlds avoid being turned into a mere “wasteland of sense”, as the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy asks in his book *Dis-Enclosure* (2008: 4)? Given that narratives about the “death of God” today tend to merge with ominous predictions about the “eclipse of truth” and the “end of man”, this question must be at the forefront of contemporary philosophical reflection.

### *Questioning the secular-religious divide*

Recent deconstructions of the secular-religious divide may lead one to assume that this challenge has already been taken up as a major task in current thought, notably by Nancy. For in these deconstructions, the tendency of secularism to advocate for universal truth as against the presumed contingency and locality of religious belief and hence to embrace globalization is questioned. However, confronted with the still immature ideas – in current scholarship – of the “post-secular” as well as the “post-colonial”, philosophy *across the globe* is in fact called upon to recognize that humanity is not yet past the last “post”– and perhaps will never be. In this situation, philosophy must take up the challenge of an explicit response to the truth about these unmediated figures often relegated to a past many deem to have overcome. The fact that both the “return of religion” and new racist fault lines of exclusion have cast a shadow on modern ideals of discursive reason, deliberative justice and reciprocal recognition, urges us to revisit the secular-religious divide. For, if all conceptions of communal being oscillate dangerously between the Scylla of some purely procedural integration and the Charybdis of a relapse into an integrist “body politic”, if in other words these conceptions are incapable of avowing the violence that characterises the “bonds of separation” (Heraclitus) – then does not that attest to the bankruptcy of social and political philosophy as such? The lack of reference (of truth and ground) that is often nominated as a major reason for such incapacity underlies a concrete, lived experience. This experience haunts contemporary thought, because it concerns

the unavoidability of a radically open, ‘superdiverse’ (Vertovec 2007) and inherently plural world that has to invent itself time and again in order to avoid a violent closure.

### *Dis-enclosure*

This special issue is not intended as a memorial for Nancy. It will instead be a thematic exchange of thoughts amongst several invited scholars, using Nancy’s notion of *dis-enclosure*, denoting an opening up of the world, as an inspiration to think through this experience and its implications in a variety of contexts. The notion inherently invites us to think about the thematic of the opening up of the world in new ways, also beyond Nancy’s own thinking. For instance, the same notion is at work in the oeuvre of the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe. His writings on Frantz Fanon and the event of decolonization explore humans’ capacities to imagine the opening of a world that extends beyond the closure of racist violence and the “infernal machine” (Sartre) of colonial heritages. Nancy calls for the deconstruction and *dis-enclosure* of Christianity, not only in its onto-theological figuration, but in its political-theological implications as well. Albeit not explicitly unfolded, this very gesture calls at the same time for the *dis-enclosure* of the ethnocentrism of the West. Mbembe, who in turn takes up this problematic and appropriates the notion of *dis-enclosure* as decolonization, brings it to bear most explicitly on the question of the political: How may one open up a struggle for a world where one can be a human amongst other humans, without one’s *dissent* being transformed into a means for exclusion (either of oneself or others) from the discursive bonds of humanity?

### *Dis-enclosure and entangled humanism*

Central to the thinking of dis-enclosure is a reconsideration of what human being-in-common may mean if every *shared* community is always also a *partitioned* community (*geteilte Gemeinschaft – communauté partagée*). Whereas it is of paramount importance to theoretically oppose the idea of a merely procedurally unified society that justifies various forms of violence to instrumentally secure some endangered form of belonging, social body, or unscathed identity, such critical work, however, requires concrete application and testing. This idea of reconsidering our shared ontological constitution also extends beyond the question of human community to the planetary as such, where the sharing of the world concerns taking responsibility for what the American political theorist William Connolly calls “entangled humanism”, in the face of the deepening social and ecological crises.

### *Dis-enclosing Western sovereignty*

The special issue “Politics of Dis-enclosure” proposes to contribute exactly to this task by way of applying the motif of *dis-enclosure* to deconstruct the disconcerting race-religion-complex that takes shape in the maelstrom of globalization. As a matter of fact, the contemporary, parallel ways in which racialized and religious “others” are classified and dominated attest to the necessity to rethink political systems with regard to the logic of exclusion that they disavowedly entertain. In this regard, the overall challenge of critical thought once again consists in not falling prey to the same logic one seeks to overcome, wherein the dominated becomes the dominator, “when victims become killers” (Mamdani, 2001). This tendency is prevalent in various figurations in post-colonial countries and in the

Middle East. In the last few decades, it has also become very visible in the self-perpetuating logic of Western sovereignty which is running havoc on a global scale. In its paranoid quest to secure global domination, the Western ideal of sovereignty has turned parasitic upon the presumed irrationality and violence of its relevant others: religious, radicalized, racial, etc.—others who are misperceived as forces endangering the pacifying order of the liberal imaginary and its neoliberal catechism. The religious other, not dissimilar to the racial other, thus becomes locked up in a “double anxiety” (Appadurai): it entails the fear of inclusion in alienating terms, as well as the fear of exclusion, which means the exclusion from history itself. This seems to leave nothing but violence as a means of self-expression and thus makes the image of the inferior other petrifying. We seek to disentangle the resurgent race-religion constellation that thrives on this globalized double-bind.

### *Context and aim*

This special issue is based on a colloquium held on April 26 and 27, 2023 in Vienna, organized by the Research Centre for Religion & Transformation in Contemporary Society (RAT) (<https://www.religionandtransformation.at/en/>) and the International Research Consortium ‘Simagine’ (<https://simagineconsortium.com>). Both the colloquium and special issue were initially envisioned to take their impetus from an inspiring and innovative engagement with Nancy and Mbembe. Sadly, Nancy passed away in 2021. Nevertheless, the aspiration is to continue exploring the ideas and themes evoked from the initial impetus of the conference, in conversation with Mbembe and other scholars.

The aim of the special issue is to assess the critical value and productive meaning of the motif of *dis-enclosure* to foster new contributions to world theory, contributions that take most seriously the often disavowed interplay of community, violence, and liberation in various contexts.

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### **Proposed deadlines**

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