

# TRANSCULTURAL DIALOGUES

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## AUTUMN EQUINOX

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**FINE**  
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for New Dialogues



INTELLECTUAL  
DIALOGUE

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## INTRODUCTION TO FIND'S FORUM 2021 ON ALAIN DANIÉLOU “LABYRINTH TRACES”

The following text reproduces Adrián Navigante's introduction to FIND's Forum “Transcultural Encounters 2021”, focused on the work and thought of Alain Daniélou. FIND's Forum 2021 gathered researchers from different disciplines, from Indology and Tibetology to Philosophy, Anthropology and Musicology. Its main purpose was to reflect on the aspects of Alain Daniélou's thought that can be an inspiration for the XXI century both on an intellectual and artistic level.



FIND Forum 2021 on Alain Daniélou at the Labyrinth, Zagorolo. Photo by Paula Winkler.

### The twisted path of knowledge

“The path of knowledge is twisted [*vakra*]”<sup>1</sup>, writes Alain Daniélou in *Shiva and Dionysus*. The reference to *Brhādaranyaka-Upaniṣad* is easy to recognize<sup>2</sup>, but – as usual – Daniélou plays with it: he explores its semantic limits and introduces a perspectivist shift. The Upanishad says that knowledge of Brahman (the highest form of knowledge) is of the kind of ontological identification: *aham brahmāsmi*. The first one who *realized* that type of knowledge was Brahman itself: an act of cosmogonic self-recognition; an act out of which the world arose. The moment Brahman realized the equation of

its own identity (or being) through non-identity (or becoming), each instance of difference (that is, each individuated being in the world of multiplicity) was automatically capable of realizing ‘I am Brahman’ [*aham brahmāsmi*], since the latter is – in the context of the early Upanishads – the core of reality to which they are all related and the totality they all compose. Now, for Daniélou, the full identity of Brahman became unreachable from the very moment in which multiplicity arose as such. In place of identity, *connection* – in the sense of ‘tie’ or ‘bond’ [*pāśa*] – prevails, and the gods desire to protect that order of interconnectedness, which is why they don’t want humans to gain knowl-

edge [*brahmavidyā*]: if they did, they would know *the whole*, they would *lose perspective*. The twisted path, *vakramārga*, is at the same time the emergence of the triangle of the Goddess (*Vakrā*) out of the *bindu*: *vakramārga* (twisted path) as *vakrāyāmārga* (path of the goddess). What is *brahman* without its ontologically creative self-awareness? What is the self [*ātman*] without a corresponding body of energies [*adyāśakti*, primal force]? The “twisted path” is for Daniélou the experience of Life, where the “twisting” is combined with the “(un-) folding”: it is a Labyrinth. Nothing can make its deployment retroactively implode, nothing can spare us deviations, detours and roundabouts along the path(s). The fact that human beings can neither eliminate the dimension of mystery nor entertain the illusion of grasping it first-hand accounts for the reciprocity between “divine fantasy” and “human adventure”.

### Picking up the (Labyrinth) traces

The twisted path of knowledge consists of different elements brought together in a logic of integration. In order to understand Alain Daniélou’s life and thought, one has to read them – and *re-read* them, many times – *with cartographic attention*, picking up the traces he left and trying to put them together, rethinking at the same time their validity in our present context. This includes also a study of the reception of his thought, mainly of two opposite trends which I may term “scholarly” and “esoteric”. In a way, Daniélou himself called for that type of reception, since on the one hand he did scholarly work (translations and interpretations of classical Hindu texts, field-work and theoretical insights into traditional Indian music, research into the history and pre-history of South Asian culture, etc.), and on the other hand he was influenced by authors related to the Perennialist trend, mainly by René Guénon, whose prescriptive Hinduism (in the usual form of “universal Vedanta”, not

very different from Radhakrishnan’s *Hindu View of Life*<sup>3</sup>) was diametrically opposed to the procedures of modern and secular research. For the scholarly reception, Daniélou did not have a really substantiated knowledge of Indian culture, because he did not share the epistemological tools and methods of the Western (and Westernized) university elite: the most flagrant example is his interpretation of Shaivism as a pre-Aryan, ecstatic religion of Nature with animistic basis. In the esoteric field, he was repudiated because he showed aspects of the Hindu tradition quite opposed to its spiritualized reception, such as the relationship between eroticism and the divine, some transgressive aspects of Tantric rituals and a critical attitude towards a certain fetishism of initiation and an overemphasis on soteriology (as opposed to the restricted role of *mokṣa* in the context of the *puruṣārthas*).

Neither the scholarly nor the Perennialist elements of his work provide the key to grasp the complex and evasive character of Daniélou’s thought. In fact, they can even be misleading, especially if used as an exclusive criterion to decide on the objective validity<sup>4</sup> of his ideas and statements. Daniélou operated in different registers (music, philosophy, religion, literature, etc.) and displayed a perspectivist view of the phenomena he dealt with. To render things more complicated, he did not reject the type of approach that replaced critical distance by empathic identification. He did not only write *about* Shaivism, also (and mainly) *as a Shaivite*, but his Shaivism was at the same time permeated by a profound awareness and a constructive use of his *mleccha*-status. If we thoroughly examine his life, the status of *mleccha* (foreigner, stranger) began already in his childhood in Brittany and persisted not only in India but also after his return to Europe during the last period of his life<sup>5</sup>. What he mainly owed to India was a protean reeducation of perception and cognition, encom-

passing a broad spectrum from exchanges with pandits on Upanishadic, epic and Shastric Literature to oral teachings of ritual specialists about Tantric techniques of empowerment as well as traditional learning of Hindustani music. In all this, Daniélou was not mimetic (as he sometimes said he had been), but (re-) creative. He adapted the results of his reeducation – to a greater or lesser degree – to new contexts, availing himself of the main elements he had elaborated *for his own life*. In this sense, it is useless to expect a reconstruction of those contents, for example the contents of Shaivism, exclusively based on objective standards of epigraphy, history and philology. Scholarly reconstruction is led by a “will-to-truth” whose condition of possibility is the exclusion of every trace of subjectivity. For Daniélou, subjectivity is essential, not as a sign of impulsiveness and arbitrariness, but rather as an opening to levels of understanding inaccessible to objective vivisection. “Objectivity”, for its part, is no neutral position of universal validity, but a culturally conditioned way of constructing reality, and in many cases a strategy of domination.

In his book on Afro-American religions *Petersilie* (1976), German ethnologist and writer Hubert Fichte declared that the discipline of ethnology should be “poetically set free”<sup>6</sup>. This is no romantic or naïve affirmation. Quite the contrary, Hubert Fichte followed a programmatic initiative carried out decades before by French sociologist Roger Bastide, whose work is built on a fertile logic of tension between the poetic and the scholarly. In 1946 Bastide wrote an essay in Portuguese *A propósito da poesia como método sociológico*, in which he introduces poetic intuition as a tool to bridge the cultural distance between the observer and the phenomenon being studied. Bastide’s attitude is not a mere rejection of positivistic standards, but a plea for transformation of hermeneutic parameters, since poets are – at least in modern societies – incarnations of *displaced thought*

and habits regarding the dominant standards of cultural identity. There is a dimension of subjectivity in which impressions, perceptions and feelings encroach on the collective dynamics of the foreign culture, especially when the researcher blurs the limits between his own mechanisms of world-configuration and those of the other culture<sup>7</sup>. The result of this process is not the end of scholarship (it suffices to read Bastide’s best-known book *Le Candomblé de Bahia* to attest the quality of his work), but a reframing of it or, more precisely, an end to the belief that the world-configuration of the scholar incarnates the neutral parameter and sheds an unprecedented light on the observed phenomenon. Bastide’s monumental book *Les religions africaines au Brésil* (1960) bears the subtitle “towards a sociology of the interpenetration of civilizations” [*vers une sociologie des interpénétrations des civilisations*]. His use of the term “interpenetration” does not only refer to the bidirectional acculturation between Africa and Brazil, or to the intricate dynamics and tensions within the universe of Candomblé, but also to a topological transformation of ethnographic research. Through immersion in the culture of “the other”, a change of position takes place in the researcher, and the last bulwark of resistance lies in the intellectual tools the researcher makes use of. Such tools cannot be distinguished from the (unconscious) conviction of the ability to *objectively* (= *unprejudiced*) understand the other.

### Ethnology and Philology: India and beyond

The ideological dimension of scientific objectivity not only entails domination strategies, but also un-reflected prejudices. Hegel was convinced that the Indian spirit was dominated by “phantasy” as opposed to “reason”<sup>8</sup>. This position was inherited – among many other authors – by Irish Indologist Vincent Smith (1843-1920), whose views on India’s lack of

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political unity and historical awareness went hand in hand with the conviction of Indology as a “natural science” (a conviction shared, among others, by Max Müller). The basic idea is that “nature” (*in the singular*) is the realm of objectivity discovered by Western science, which would ensure the spread of universally valid knowledge as opposed to the particular, fragmentary and changing habits of non-European “cultures” (*in the plural*). This is quite clear in Sir Monier William’s *Religious Thought and Life in India* (1883), a book from which one could extract a schematic classification of prejudices towards Indian traditions – basically on three levels: 1. Brahmanism as impersonal monistic pantheism, 2. Hinduism (Vaishnavism and Shaivism) as personal dual theism and 3. Local traditions related to Shakta cults as a form of disease “which is best expressed by the term of *demonophobia*”<sup>9</sup>.

Monier-Williams’s scheme seems far from the exercise of Indology today. However, Roland Inden (from the University of Chicago), in his book *Imagining India* (1990), expresses his conviction that we cannot so easily walk away from the naturalist discourse of the XIX century. Humanist dissenters, writes Inden, “have justifiably claimed that the subjectivity of others has to be taken into account [...]. Yet, their challenge has been less formidable than it might first seem. Most have taken a position that supplements or complements the absolutist position of the naturalists rather than replacing it”<sup>10</sup>. Scientific objectivity not only dies hard but may surprisingly flourish in non-European contexts to the detriment

of autochthonous traditions. From Brajendranath Seal’s *The Positive Science of Ancient Hindus* (1915) to the nationalists’ attempts of today to prove that the “scientificity” of the Vedic tradition equates the insights of Albert Einstein or Werner Heisenberg: the drastic and violent reduction of the manifold world-configurations in the Indian Subcontinent to a homogeneous naturalism with metaphysical appendices shows rather a history of Indian submission to the modern Western spirit than strategies and politics of resistance. At the same time, metaphysical conceptions prove to be impotent against intellectual colonialism the moment they become functional for a comfortable exercise of comparatism. Classical Chinese and Hindu culture – that is, the urban and written culture of socio-religious elites – could very easily be integrated into a general law of spiritual progress – the peak of which was European Christianity. In this sense, Brajendranath Seal’s notion of Hinduism as a guide to the regeneration of universalist (European) values and Sarvepalli Radakrishnan’s idea of Vedanta as *philosophia perennis* amalgamating the ultimate meaning of East and West also follow a logic of submission.

What I described earlier with regard to ethnology, namely the discipline’s internal critique of its own presuppositions and certainties, has barely reached the philological field in South Asian Studies. Texts are palimpsests of historical and geographical layers, not only of different contexts but also of different world-configurations. What is the point in reconstructing the meaning of a text using the





The North Portico in Knossos, Crete. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

world-configuration of the interpreter (let's say as "methodological desideratum"), if the interpreter does not work on the assumptions turning his own position into an unquestionable parameter of neutrality? Alain Daniélou rejected the use of the prefix "ethno-" because, in his time, it was the mark of an asymmetrical relationship between the researcher and its object, or in other words: the delimitation of particular values (of foreign cultures) from the universal value of the judgements (of European researchers) about "the foreign" or "the other". Today, the status of the prefix "ethno-" is precisely the opposite. At the end of the XX century, ethnology reached the point of questioning not only the methods to be applied in the field of research, but also the lens through

which the other is experienced before it is analyzed and described. This was called the "ontological turn in anthropology", from which emerged the awareness that modern Western scholars are as "ethno-" as the others (non-Western, non-scholars), but without knowing it<sup>11</sup>. Daniélou's Labyrinth can be seen as an indirect anticipation of that turn.

### Transversal dignity

In the light of the massive transformations brought about by scholarly self-critique – especially since the "ontological turn in anthropology" –, Daniélou's vocabulary may seem imprecise and rather old-fashioned; his radical anti-Western position may appear as



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a one-sided, context-bound reaction against a project of global dominance; his approximation to Perennialism becomes acceptable only as a counterbalance to his defense of the scientific method in the face of fundamentalist dogmas. But Daniélou's insights and ideas went far beyond his vocabulary as well as his polemic declarations and reactions. Almost everything one may think about Daniélou *at face value* proves to be inadequate in taking his own "labyrinth traces" seriously. He praised classical Brahmanical orthodoxy, but he was quite heterodox in his intellectual *modus operandi*, which extended to non-Aryan, even marginal or tribal cultures of the Indian subcontinent. He declared himself a Shaivite, but Shaivism was for him no theistic trend within Hinduism; it was rather a hermeneutical tool providing access to world-configurations alien to the Western cultural complex of "monotheism-enlightenment". The conceptual pair "Shaivite-Dionysian" provides evidence of the risks he took in his own exercise of "transversality". In the last period of his life, not only did he amplify the horizon of his research to include African traditions (in the 1970s and 1980s) and Amerindian local cultures (in the 1990s), but he also radicalized his shift from the past towards the future. He wanted not only to reconstruct the values of different cultures he thought neces-

sary to rethink ours, but also and particularly to incorporate a modality of experience susceptible of modifying our own world-configuration. He didn't want to renounce the dignity of actively opposing a uniformed *Weltanschauung* and rescuing the necessary elements so as to account existentially for the diversity and richness of the manifested world. For Daniélou, the world does not exist as a complete whole that can be discovered by a sudden metaphysical insight or progressively by objective science. On the contrary, the world actualizes itself through different modalities of being, each one of which is fully complete, consistent and reasonable. It is that gesture that FIND Intellectual Dialogue intends to pursue, mainly because it is now becoming a call for another kind of humanism, in which not only the frontiers of the West are surpassed, but also the idea of the human that has prevailed so far – also involving a redefinition of the non-human and the hierarchy of beings and relations. Those are the aspects that I would like to emphasize in our discussion during the Forum, far beyond the certainties that each one of us carries within the immanence of our own field. This Forum about Alain Daniélou aims at recovering his transversal dignity, which for him was much more essential than his intellectual certainties. •

<sup>1</sup> Alain Daniélou, *Shiva et Dionysos*, Paris 1979, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Eṣām [devānām] tan na priyam yad etan manuṣyā vidyuh [aham brahmāsmi]*, literally: “to those [gods] it is not pleasing that humans should know this [= I am Brahman] (BĀU 1.4.10).

<sup>3</sup> “The Vedānta is not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance”, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* London: New York 1954 (first edition 1927), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> An empirical objectivity in the case of scholarship, and a metaphysical objectivity in the case of Perennialism.

<sup>5</sup> The discovery of the divine was for Daniélou closely related to the forces of Nature (in the woods of Brittany) as opposed to the Catholic religion of his mother (cf. Alain Daniélou, *Le chemin du labyrinthe*, Lausanne 2015, pp. 13-14). In India, Brahmanical orthodoxy was his main referent, but his emphasis on the pre-Aryan origins of Shaivism and his inversion of colonialist commonplaces about the religion of rural areas was quite heterodox and triggered another movement of thought (cf. Alain Daniélou, *Approche de l'hindouisme*, Paris 2005, p. 35, *Shivaïsme et tradition primordiale*, Paris, p. 43, *Shiva et Dionysos*, Paris 1979, pp. 17-19). Daniélou's project of a “return to paganism” in the last twenty-five years of his life distinguished itself both from Christian mainstream ideology as well as from the neo-pagan right-wing initiatives related to the supremacy of European identity, which flourished in the 1970s and 1980s (in this

respect see among others Karla Poewe, Scientific neo-paganism and the extreme-right then and today: from Ludendorff's *Gotterkenntnis* to Sigrid Hunke's *Europas Eigene Religion*, in: *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14:3, 1999, pp. 387-400).

<sup>6</sup> Hubert Fichte, *Petersilie. Die Afro-Amerikanischen Religionen: Santo Domingo, Venezuela, Miami, Grenada*, Frankfurt 1976, p. 363.

<sup>7</sup> Bastide's book *Images du Nordeste mystique en noir et blanc* (1945) is a clear example of a combination of poetical and sociological registers to avoid a science that – in his own words – “smells like insecticide” (cf. Roger Bastide, A propósito da poesia como método sociológico, in: *Cadernos*, n. 10, 1.a série, São Paulo 1977, pp. 75-82, quotation p. 77).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Frankfurt XXXX, pp. 339, where Hegel employs adjectives like “baroque, wild, horrible and disgusting” to define the essential determination [*Hauptgrundbestimmung*] of this form of religion and mythology.

<sup>9</sup> Sir Monier Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India*, London 1883, p. 210.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, Oxford 1990, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> This corresponds to Bruno Latour's view of ethnocentrism as the ignorance of one's own particularity disguised in the ambition of universal validity (cf. Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, Paris 1991).



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# BECAUSE THE NIGHT BELONGS TO LOVERS: INTERSECTING PERSPECTIVES ON “CREATURES OF THE NIGHT” BETWEEN THE CARIBBEAN AND JAPAN

In this essay, a combination of personal experience and anthropological reflection, Philippe Charlier takes us to the uncanny world of the night in two non-European cultures: the Haitian and the Japanese. Beyond a description of the non-human beings populating the night and interacting with sleeping humans (usually against the will of the latter), the dimension of what is usually called the «supernatural» and its manifold aspects shows some specific features that seem to establish a link between the two cultural spheres and their respective world-configurations. A text of transcultural relevance with subjective overtones.

Translated from the French by Kenneth Hurry



Port au Prince, Haiti. Photo by Alex Proimos. Wikimedia Commons.

Since at least an hour, night has fallen on Port-au-Prince. We have spent the day scouring the cemeteries around the capital, looking for vodou rituals: dolls with pins stuck in them, curses (*uanga*) tied to gravestones, coffins disinterred, cut-up playing cards at the foot of the Baron Samedi crosses, bones covered with oil and cheap rum, etc. My notebook is full of sketches, and I have been able to collect numerous samples and photographic details.

On the hotel terrace, beside my beer, a plate contains a score of red beans with chili: very appetising. My driver (Jean-Richmon) blocks the movement of my hand, laughing, and

explains, “Thank goodness this isn’t a romantic meeting! You know, don’t you Philippe, that you mustn’t eat red beans on your first date?” Seeing my ignorance, he continues (while letting me eat just one), “Because it appears that some girls soak their panties in it to *bind a man*!”

“But only with red beans?”

“No! anything: rice, pasta, coffee, soda, just everything!”

“So, actually, before a romantic encounter, you must neither eat nor drink! And what do men do to bind a woman?”

"I don't know for men. But a girl told me that her Daddy had *caught her Mummy*. He went to visit witch-doctors [sorcerers], and he put a *pont* (a magic spell) in his wife's vagina, so that she wouldn't go looking elsewhere. And as soon as she left the house, she felt bad. If she had gone too far, she would have vanished. If she had deceived him, her lover would have fallen deathly sick, and perhaps she would too..."

At the next table, a young girl is listening to us. She's Haitian, a nursing auxiliary in Martinique, not indifferent to my driver's charms: she wishes to make a contribution: "One of my colleagues at the Trois-Îlets hospital told me that a patient (at the cuts and scars department) had lacerations near his penis. He told me it was a *pont*. He was 50 years old."

Then I asked her whether she had seen any practices concerning corpses, whether in the mortuary or elsewhere in Martinique.

"In the cemeteries, people sometimes come with bottles of wine or grape-juice. They say it's to make a *zombi* or to invoke a spirit. On occasions, the earth on the graves is dug up: they seek body parts to soak in wine or juice and then drink it. Their aim is to make the person return, or to kill by drinking the poisoned drink..."

But the phenomenon that seizes her whole attention, and concerns her directly, is that of the *dorlis*, "man of the night": these phantoms rape women while they are asleep, now invisible, now taking the form of an animal (toad, god, rabbit). Entering the bedroom through the keyhole, or sliding under the door, they have only one desire: to slake their insatiable sexual appetite.

"They are male spirits, rarely female (in which case they are called *succubes*). They say that to prevent it, you have to sleep with your panties inside out, or place a pot of salt or sand just

inside the door, so that it will take him a long time to count the grains. They say that when it happens to you, you wake up, but just afterwards, when it's too late. Sometimes people wake up in the morning with scratches, without knowing why. It's a *dorlis* that has passed over you. Sometimes humans take this form, with the aid of a witchdoctor, using magic formulas from ancient books of spells (*vié liv*): and the first person you see in the morning is him."

I asked her whether it had happened to her personally:

"Yes, I was sleeping, and I heard a noise. I wanted to turn over, but I couldn't move. I tried to cry out, but couldn't manage to. Everyone said it was a *dorlis*. My brother told me that it couldn't be that, just a paralysis in my sleep. Could it be? It happened to me twice. The second time, I could neither speak nor move; I felt someone standing near me. I felt that the person was laughing. It was my brother, of course. I asked him what he was doing there. He was getting dressed again... Girlfriends have told me that at night the same thing had happened to them. They couldn't move: one of them felt her bed sink, as though someone were sitting on it. Another girl heard somebody walking around her."

"So, do you follow your Mummy's directions? Do you turn your panties inside out before going to bed?"

"No. My Mummy tells me that it's best to put a rosary under my pillow, with a pair of open scissors."

Night is the realm of dreams... and creatures of nightmare. It is the very moment when a certain porosity occurs between two worlds, as it does in some isolated places conducive to such permeability (wells and cisterns, marshes, capes, mountain peaks, etc.). The ethnologist-orientalist Laurence Caillet provides a



very good description of this nocturnal ambiguity, facilitated by the “derangement of the senses” (metaphysical rather than poetic): “The night, owing to the cognitive incertitudes that it rouses, contributes to the dramatisation of a surrealistic event. The plays of light and shadow, real special effects, support the ritual effectiveness”.<sup>1</sup>

Another chronological-cultural context lends itself to anthropological comparison: Japan. Here, night is the moment when what is not human comes to life again, seeps into the daily life of towns and villages, where spaces – now abandoned by a civilisation that has retired into its dwellings or shut in beneath a reassuring covering – are peopled with supernatural beings: the primordial deities of Shinto (*kami*),<sup>2</sup> wandering phantoms, folkloric monsters (*yokai*), ancestors leaving their tombs or funerary altars, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas roaming the world in search of souls seeking reincarnation or maleficent entities threatening order and justice, etc. Sometimes their release is spontaneous, sometimes facilitated by the rituals of sorcerers, by people’s nightmares, by still-active spells, or the moon’s beams.

Night is a dangerous chasm, the moment when any metamorphosis becomes possible, when the ambivalent darkness facilitates dissimulation and errors of judgement. Woe to him who gets lost or is shut up in ruins, grottoes, abandoned buildings, beneath a bridge, or in a forest. These margins of the world are sacred to creatures of fable that never cease to pester humans: “In daytime, many of them conceal

themselves among humans, constantly fearing that their true nature will be revealed. (...) When such beings, through their apparitions, menace the borders between the worlds, it is the task of humans to reveal their presence and to chase them away, in order to re-establish the fragile barriers of species. These categories are reconstructed by metamorphosis, by topographical anomalies, at particularly favourable moments for all transformations and for the most baroque forms of existence”.<sup>3</sup>

For supernatural creatures, at night everything is permitted. This temporal and spatial fault/warp, a kind of temporary and magical opening between two worlds, is the ideal moment for visiting humans, interfering in their homes by using the most appropriate metamorphosis, and duping them to achieve their ends. Hence the necessity for limits, walls, doors and talismans erecting either physical or magical barriers. Separation means surviving longer, whence the interest in establishing frontiers – and assuring they are respected – in space and time, guarantors of balance and harmony.

Like the *dorlis* of the Afro-Caribbean worlds, other mysterious creatures come to visit young girls after nightfall in traditional Japan. It’s best not to trust them, because such love stories often end badly.

“*Iku-tama-yori-bime* received nocturnal visits from a man of whom she knew neither his name nor social status. Since she was pregnant, her parents advised her to take a needle and prick the bottom of her lover’s garment. Next morning, following the thread that passed through the keyhole, the young woman and her

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parents together reached the shrine of Miwa and understood that their nocturnal visitor was none other than the god of Miwa. Indeed, he often takes the semblance of a serpent to facilitate his passage through keyholes. His real body however is none other than the mountain itself (...). She only met him at night. One day, she asked her nocturnal husband to show his handsome face in full light. After much prevarication, he accepted, telling the princess that he would be in her comb box, but that she should not show any surprise. However, when she opened the little box and saw a magnificent small snake, she could not stop herself crying out. The god, then taking his human semblance, told her that he was leaving her and soared up to heaven. In despair, the princess committed suicide by thrusting a stick into her vagina.”<sup>4</sup>

Even the procedure utilised for the suicide of this unhappy girl recalls the sexual context of – forbidden - relations between a human and a supernatural creature (in this case a god who excels in metamorphoses to sate his erotic passion).

One evening in Tokyo, it was late when I left the tea-house and I had to reach the station in order to return to my hotel. To save time, I decided to cross a cemetery (a foolish gesture at that time of day!). A man saw me enter and make my way among the tombs, and decided to follow me... to protect me and ensure that I would get out alive from my jump into the unknown. As soon as I reached the other side, without saying a word to me, his mission accomplished, he walked off in the other direction ... taking care, this time, to follow the cemetery walls on the outside.

Necropolises are actually the favourite haunts of the *gaki*, souls badly-reincarnated owing to the lack of complete rites: in the midst of grave-stones, to “survive”, they are forced to devour

human corpses, small animals or lost children. They beg (useless) prayers from strollers and the devout, grabbing the folds of their kimono with their claws... or apparent bones!

One such maleficent being is portrayed in a famous print by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861): *Takiyasha the Witch and the Skeleton Spectre* (1844).<sup>5</sup> The plot unfolds in the 10th century, when Princess Takiyasha, living in the ruins of the palace of her father, an old warlord who had led a rebellion, summons a mythical being to frighten the emperor’s envoys hunting out the last conspirators. To do so, she grasps a horizontal scroll and reads its magic formulas, leading to the spectre’s materialisation. With his long bony fingers(!), he physically threatens the two men and forces them to flee ...

Careful, though: let us not deceive ourselves: there are phantoms and phantoms. No two *yureis* are alike.<sup>6</sup> In their thirst for organising chaos, the religious and the devout have worked out a sort of classification (hierarchy?) of revenants: first are female spirits animated by a desire for revenge for actions committed while they were alive (*onryo*); then come women who died in childbirth or while pregnant, who never cease leaving their tombs in order to approach living children – which they take for their own – with sweets (*ubume*); and then that old military or political élite who provoke catastrophes while seeking to re-establish a *post-mortem* justice (*goryo*); or those who have drowned, whose bodies have never been recovered (*funa-yurei*)...

The *yokais* (literally “bewitching apparition”) are also known by many names, vainly attempting to account for their infinite propensity for metamorphosis and ruse: *ayakashi* (“strange thing”), *mononoke* (“demonic spirit”), *ma-mono* (“true monster”).

And then there are foxes, perhaps the most extraordinary animal in Japanese culture.



Grand Cimetière, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Photo by Yoni Rubin. Wikimedia Commons.

The fox is deemed to be of great intelligence, endowed with magical powers, the “master of disorder”, reputed to be able to live an incalculable number of lives. From one existence to another, its supernatural power increases and it becomes outwardly visible by multiplying the number of tails it possesses, up to a maximum of nine. Its coat also evolves along its way to perfection, until it becomes golden or white: it is then capable of omniscience, of seeing everything, hearing everything, understanding everything. Its capacity for metamorphosis is infinite, but it prefers to be incarnate in the features of a beautiful young woman, passed in the night in an isolated place, who seeks to seduce a man and lead him to a phantom dwelling or palace of dreams. Physically, an

expert eye – that of a priest or scholar – can discover the signs or peculiarities that lead to their supernatural nature being suspected, since there is always something foxy in the body of such women: a narrow face with eyes close together, high cheekbones, triangular chin, thin eyebrows, discreet fluff on the back – a relic of their coat – and, often, their shadow or reflection in a mirror is that of their true essence and not of their human metamorphosis. This is why such beings avoid sources of bright light, great clarity, and whatever can potentially cause a reflection (mirror, metal pan, water surface, etc.).

These foxes can be compared to the *dorlis* of the Caribbean: they penetrate the intimacy of

homes when night has fallen, taking advantage of the inhabitants' sleep or lowering of their vigilance, and, during a final metamorphosis or momentary lack of consciousness, they pass on to action.<sup>7</sup> Pregnancies may follow, whose fruit will be a hybrid being, bearing the physical trace of its supernatural parent.

Other creatures such as the *buruburu* (literally "flicker-flicker" / "tremble-tremble") more than anything like to get into the gaps in clothing to enlase women and men, making them shiver and, sometimes, even faint from fear ... or pleasure.<sup>8</sup> In some ways they recall the Polynesian *tupapa'u*, sometimes announced by a strong odour of putrefaction that occasionally manages to penetrate inside the body of their "prey", which can be got rid of, after a fashion, by cutting off a cat's tail, setting it

alight and whipping the victim's nose with it.<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, the night is also the moment when aged objects become animated: in traditional Japan, the age of objects finally confers on them vitality "by transfer", "by accumulation" from those who have used them year after year. "Domestic objects often take on life on their one-hundredth birthday. We could mention, in a general way, straw sandals, a lute, a paper lantern, old umbrellas, old sake jars, kettles, a paper screen, etc. Life is given them by the use made of them, by the accumulation of gestures accomplished over them, with them".<sup>10</sup> Such objects are charged, vitalised, animated. They are nourished by that life force until they are "born" on accomplishing a century of existence. Henceforth autonomous (and mischievous), they are capable of everything. •

<sup>1</sup> Caillet L. *Démons et merveilles. Nuits japonaises*. Nanterre, Société d'ethnologie, 2018, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> Breen J, Teeuwen M. *A New History of Shinto*. Malden & Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Caillet L. *Démons et merveilles. Nuits japonaises*. Nanterre, Société d'ethnologie, 2018, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> Caillet L. *Démons et merveilles. Nuits japonaises*. Nanterre, Société d'ethnologie, 2018, pp. 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum (London), N° Inv. E.1333:1.

<sup>6</sup> Charlier P. *Autopsie des fantômes. Une histoire du surnaturel*. Paris, Tallandier, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Hanania C. *Si l'Homme-au-Bâton m'était conté : Ernest Pépin et les mystères de Pointe-à-Pitre*. Dalhousie French Studies 2004;69:121-131.

<sup>8</sup> Mizuki S. *Yokai. Dictionnaire des monstres japonais*. Paris, Pika éditions, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Malmon I. *Le tupapau et le génie à capuche : étude d'une figure entêtante dans l'oeuvre de Paul Gauguin*. Doctoral thesis on comparative literature (under the direction of Bernard Terramorsi). Université de La Réunion, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Caillet L. *Démons et merveilles. Nuits japonaises*. Nanterre, Société d'ethnologie, 2018, p. 106.



**Basile Goudabla Kligueh**

Vodou priest, anthropologist and FIND Grantee 2021

## IS WEST-AFRICAN VODU “SHAIVITE-DIONYSIAN”? REFLECTIONS ON ALAIN DANIÉLOU AND AFRICA

This text was written in French by FIND Grantee Basile Goudabla Kligueh for FIND’s Forum 2021 shortly before his untimely death on September 6. FIND Intellectual Dialogue had organized a workshop on Vodou as a religion of Nature in June 2021, in which Basile Kligueh exposed aspects of the local traditions of West Africa and discussed their points in common with some religious phenomena in India and in the Pagan Europe Daniélou was interested in. His text for FIND’s Forum was focused on the problem of ethnocentrism, the tension that autochthonous forms of knowledge in non-European cultures implies for the Western scholarly discourse and the identity problem of people who, due to their life-experience, have become cross-cultural bridges and at the same time intellectual outcasts for the very fact of being impossible to “classify”. With Basile Kligueh’s death, FIND Intellectual Dialogue has lost an invaluable dialogical partner in matters of non-European cultures, somebody who was fully engaged in a reading of Alain Daniélou that clearly shows the mistake of those who want to reduce Daniélou’s thought to the Indian-Europe axis and read his writings following bureaucratic protocols of classification that have nothing to do with intellectual work. The text is not a finished article, but rather written notes to open a discussion in the context of the Forum. Nonetheless, it has a relevance in the transcultural debate of FIND Intellectual Dialogue and deserves to be published in the form it was submitted. Its publication is also a homage to the indefatigable researcher that Basile Kligueh has been, as well as to his openness of mind and his capacity to listen and help others.

Translated from the French by Dana Rush





Basile Goudabla Kligueh and Adrián Navigante at the Labyrinth, Zagarolo, during the workshop 2021 “Religions of Nature: the Vodou Tradition”. Photo by Paula Winkler.

In this talk, I will speak not only as a Vodou priest and doctor of anthropology, but also as a reader of Alain Daniélou and a FIND grantee. I will share with you some reflections on the question of cultural domination (very important, it seems to me, in the thought of Alain Daniélou) and link these elements with a brief presentation of my research project at FIND. I am happy to be able to do so, especially because I see that the Foundation, with this transcultural initiative of Intellectual Dialogue, takes seriously the breadth of the spirit of Alain Daniélou and wants to deepen a current debate whose questions are central for our 21st century. In his essay *Remarques sur la colonisation Culturelle* (1986), Alain Daniélou adopts a broader point of view than that of the Indologists. He criticizes the West as a colonial power,

and he also refers to Africa and the history of slavery. In dealing with the question of acculturation (or, one could also say, the problematic of assimilation), he says that the West created “collaborators” - I would rather say “endogenous colonizers” - who were used as instruments of domination. It is therefore through the eyes of these “artificial communities” that the West, even today, assesses civilizations other than the West - I have enough experience with the question of Africa, and I think that in the case of India the issue is not that different. According to Daniélou, the West has a false evaluation of other civilizations. He writes: “These artificial communities [...] are a remarkable source of false evaluation of civilizations other than the Western one, whether they are social organizations, economic realities, religion, art,

philosophy, history, etc.”<sup>1</sup>. As a result, continues Daniélou, “indigenous culture ... is presented as outdated folklore, interesting, at best, for archaeologists looking for vestiges of embryonic cultures long out of date”<sup>2</sup>. Besides, didn’t the Jacques Chirac Museum at the quai Branly in Paris almost baptize itself “Museum of primitive arts”? The way in which elements of the autochthonous cultures of Africa are presented is changing, but in what way? The intelligentsia may have changed the tenor of the discourse from explicit contempt to subtle condescension, but the question remains whether there is really a dialogue of cultures in this type of institution, and what is the participation of each actor in the process of this dialogue... In short, for a large majority of Westerners, all cultures that are not-Western are systematically “archaic”. The fact that specialists are capable of reconstructing certain aspects of those cultures with a certain rigor, which in Western parameters amounts to “science”, does not necessarily mean that this knowledge can be legitimized as the truth about the cultures in question. It will only be a partial and legitimate reconstruction for Western parameters. The main question remains: are these parameters universally valid? Daniélou did not believe so. This is why he calls this false assessment “the search for unculture”<sup>3</sup>. In this regard, he points out – this time in reference to the field of ethnomusicology – that “musical ethnology seeks in Africa, above all, the primitive”<sup>4</sup>. Personally, I would add that the West, vis-à-vis Africa, seeks the primitive in all areas. Daniélou continues: “The appearance of man on earth is not new. There does not exist, even among populations who live today in conditions

of extreme simplicity, any spoken language which does not represent an extremely long evolution and a complex elaboration allowing the expression of the most abstract ideas.”<sup>5</sup>. This ignorance led ex-President of France Sarkozy to say, for example, during a stay in Dakar, that Africa has not made enough history. We can laugh and say that this is the ignorance of a politician, but we must remember that some Africanists, even today, are convinced that the only light that can arrive in Africa is that of Western scholars who add a little order in terms of social, political, religious and even artistic intelligibility.

This false evaluation of cultures other than the West, which began with the Western conquest of the world, crystallized in Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 with “the sharing of the African cake”<sup>6</sup>. It is believed that European thought is far from that today, but it is not. The question of cultural domination is very current and not at all confined to politicians. It is also an academic question. It is precisely this attitude that Alain Daniélou condemns under the terms of concepts of cultural and racial superiority which present themselves today in the form of cultural colonialism, conditioning economic aid, which is a more subtle weapon of domination<sup>7</sup>.

In Daniélou’s autobiography, *The Way to the Labyrinth*, he writes a sentence that I consider appropriate to the situation of the African traditions that I know: “The foreign occupation [...] has deeply divided society. Those who had to collaborate with the invaders, who learned their language and attended their schools and universities, although believing

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**For a large majority of Westerners, all cultures that are not-Western are systematically “archaic”.**

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If an ethnologist crosses the boundary of participant observation, he or she is accused of "going native". The logic of discourse remains divided between native knowledge and scientifically legitimized knowledge.

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and proclaiming themselves Hindus, have only a very vague idea of Indian science, philosophy, cosmology"<sup>8</sup>. Of course, the question of economic aid greatly conditions the distribution of knowledge. I know traditional scholars in sub-Saharan Africa who would never have a job at a university, whose teaching is done well alongside the circulation of knowledge "legitimized by Western universities", and who keep a cautious distance from even moderately well-intentioned ethnologists. This fracture in the transmission of knowledge leads to the production of "Africanist texts" which occupy a dominant position but which, for the most part, fail to convince that they have really penetrated into local teachings without immediately superimposing their own conceptual tools.

Speaking of Africa, Daniélou expresses his working hypothesis as follows: "to obtain convincing results, we need a global approach on anthropological, linguistic, religious, ritual, mythological and social levels"<sup>9</sup>, but this approach must absolutely take into account the way in which the world is configured by the actors of the groups studied. The first obstacle presents itself with what French anthropologist Philippe Descola calls "modes of identification" and "modes of relationship"<sup>10</sup>. How then do we approach, for example, the ritual world of Africa? Is a description external to the rituals valid? If an ethnologist crosses the boundary of participant observation (with the objective distance to exclude any interference from the subjectivity of the individual in the evaluation of practices), he or she is accused of "going native". The logic of discourse remains divided between native knowledge and scien-

tifically legitimized knowledge. But there is also a second problem: with the specialization of academic knowledge today, it is unlikely that the disciplines Daniélou considers necessary to bring together will really communicate with each other. Does interdisciplinarity exist today? We can organize seminars, but that does not ensure a dialogue. There are many types of analytical skills among scholars, but what type of synthesis could or should be done? Daniélou writes very synthetically, he seeks to link several levels of reflection, but for this reason he is criticized (or ignored) by scholars.

In the essay *Relation entre les cultures dravidiennes et négro-africaines* (1978), Daniélou offers a synthesis between India and Africa to consider the issue of local knowledge. He writes: "A very great civilization, the vehicle of which was a Dravidian language and the religion Shaivism, is an essential component of all subsequent civilizations of India and the countries of the Mediterranean. It appears that a large part of the African continent must have participated in this vast culture"<sup>11</sup>. He adds the following proposition: "we should take up all African studies starting from the hypothesis of an African participation in the great protohistoric Dravidian civilization"<sup>12</sup>.

This working hypothesis is not acceptable in scholarly circles, quite simply because the extension of the Dravidian substrate is not scientifically detectable, even if there are clues which could authorize research of this type. But that is not the question that interests me. Even if we do not accept the Dravidian question as scientifically valid, the question is

whether or not we could consider it a starting position in Daniélou to work on parallels and cultural similarities instead of insisting on the progressive fragmentation of knowledge due to increasing specialization? If we accept the possibility of taking this position, we should ask ourselves what type of project Daniélou had in relation to non-Aryan civilizations (not only in the Indian subcontinent, but also in Africa and ancient Europe), and what was his motivation?

The research project I proposed for the FIND 2021 Grant Program fits well with the idea of the rehabilitation of non-Western cultures, which was so important for Alain Daniélou. There are several reasons for undertaking such a project:

N ° 1: At first glance, I would be part of what Daniélou calls “the artificial community” which works to perpetuate the domination of peripheral countries. I have a doctorate in religious anthropology from La Sorbonne University, and I am a certified teacher in a school in France. I must face and further reflect on this challenge.

N ° 2: From a religious point of view, Vodou is one of the best known religions in West Africa. My thesis deals with Vodou, and I defended it at the University of La Sorbonne, but at the same time my approach and my reflections were met with many obstacles among Western Africanists, because I did not adhere to mainstream hermeneutics.

N ° 3: From the point of view of the “globalization of research”, my thesis concerns the whole of the Adza-Tado people who know and practice Vodou. I remain today the only person to have done field research, with an internal knowledge of the area as well as some of the languages of the region from the Nigeria-Benin border, through Togo, to Afiadényigbà, Ghana. All this Adza-Tado terri-

tory was divided into three between France and England. I do not confine myself to the Evés, the Fons, the Wemenous or the kingdom of Abomey to extrapolate Vodou to all of West Africa. I want to know how Vodou adapts to time and space across this land of over fifty million people. This is perhaps also a critical point with regard to Daniélou’s ideas on the dynamics of identity.

N ° 4: For a reassessment of research on indigenous cultures, with the collaboration of Africans, I wish to supplement the work carried out by foreigners, both African and Western, with a point of view coming from within, while considering the tensions between outside and inside in the very constitution of the reception of African Vodou in the last centuries. I am not only a researcher in the academic sense of the term; I am also a practicing Vodou priest. This is also the tension that I face.

N ° 5: From a religious point of view, the globalizing basis of Vodou is the Afà geomancy. I am a priest of Afà geomancy. That is, I have a systematic knowledge of mythology and cosmology from the perspective of the ancestors.

N ° 6: My research project for the 2021 FIND Grant Program is entitled: “Africa-India: Towards a recovery of indigenous knowledge following the inspiration of Alain Daniélou”.

The phrase, “following the inspiration of Alain Daniélou,” is not at all demagogic. Even if Daniélou affirmed himself as “Hindu”, he was not so in a strict sense, because the gap of being born in Europe is essential for his career despite his radical identification with some of the indigenous knowledge of India. This is what interests me. I spoke with Adrián Navigante several times about Alain Daniélou, and I share his conviction that behind the discourse of orthodoxy and the affirmation of an India foreign to Europe, Daniélou was



aware of his situation and he was much more heterogeneous than he said. This is not necessarily a contradiction, but a way of adapting his experience and the knowledge learned to the dynamics of his life which did not take place only in India.

Daniélou returned to Europe, and he thought about Shaivism from other perspectives. In my opinion, the meaning of linking Shiva and Dionysus is not a motive that comes from religious comparativism, but rather a way of making one's own experience consistent. He wanted to remain faithful to his learning while embracing a dynamics of change. So do I, but the other way around. I was born in Africa, I was "assimilated" into the Western world, and now I must make a synthesis, but this synthesis, inspired by Daniélou, takes into account, above all, the asymmetry of cultures. Africa and Europe are not two continents communicating with each other on the same level. There is a relationship of domination, and this aspect cannot remain outside of a research project. To say that these questions are irrelevant because they are removed from the sphere of scientific knowledge is an ideological attitude. The "objectivity" of this knowledge is built on the basis of political and cultural domination.

To the question of the relationship between the

Shaivite-Dionysian pairing and Vodun, I cannot provide a clear answer at this stage of my research, but I have the following impression from my dialogues with Adrián and his team: if the conceptual pairing "Shaivite-Dionysiac" wants to rehabilitate a "religion of Nature"<sup>13</sup>, that is to say a type of knowledge linked to religious conceptions that are not characterized by the elements that make up monotheisms (religion of the book, transcendence of the divine in relation to Nature, conception of absolute truth, primacy of history over mythology and of linear time over cyclical time, etc.), I think that the working hypothesis of the late Daniélou found in some writings on black Africa is adaptable to this conceptual framework. I do not intend nor pretend to sell myself to this audience. I do not claim possession of an unshaken truth. I simply want to say that, through his works, A. Daniélou also reaches out to the rehabilitation of African traditions. And I want to take the example of Vodun and bring this example to a field that Daniélou could not research in detail, because he was not an Africanist. In this sense, I think that the trans-cultural opening of the Intellectual Dialogue of FIND is a very good initiative to do justice to the breadth of Daniélou's spirit.

"What if Alain Daniélou is right?" •



<sup>1</sup> Alain Daniélou, Remarques sur la colonisation culturelle, in : *La civilisation des différences*, Paris 2003, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Alain Daniélou, Genocides culturels en Afrique, in: *La civilisation des différences*, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Alain Daniélou, *Ibidem*, p. 149.

<sup>4</sup> Alain Daniélou, *Ibidem*, p. 148.

<sup>5</sup> Alain Daniélou, *Ibidem*. Cf. Alain Daniélou, La dictature des scribes: "The greatest part of the cultural heritage of mankind is transmitted orally – even nowadays" (*La civilisation des différences*, pp. 122-123).

<sup>6</sup> Basile Kligueh refers to the Kongokonferenz organized by Otto von Bismark in Berlin, which marks the formalization of the "scramble for Africa" (that is, its invasion, occupation, division and colonization) during the New Imperialist period (note of the editors).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Les langages musi-*

*caux de l'Afrique Noire*, where he says that the unique goal of cultural colonization has been "to destroy the originality of Africa in order to assimilate it and reduce it to slavery and exploitation" (*Origines et pouvoirs de la musique*, pp. 97-98).

<sup>8</sup> Alain Daniélou, *Le chemin du Labyrinthe*, Lausanne 2015, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> Alain Daniélou, *Relations entre les cultures dravidiennes et négro-africaines*, in: *La civilisation de différences*, p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris 2005, pp. 163-167.

<sup>11</sup> Alain Daniélou, *Relations entre les cultures dravidiennes et négro-africaines*, in: *Une civilisation de différences*, p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> Alain Daniélou, *Ibidem*, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Shiva et Dionysos*, Paris 1979, p. 20: "Shaivism is essentially a religion of nature".



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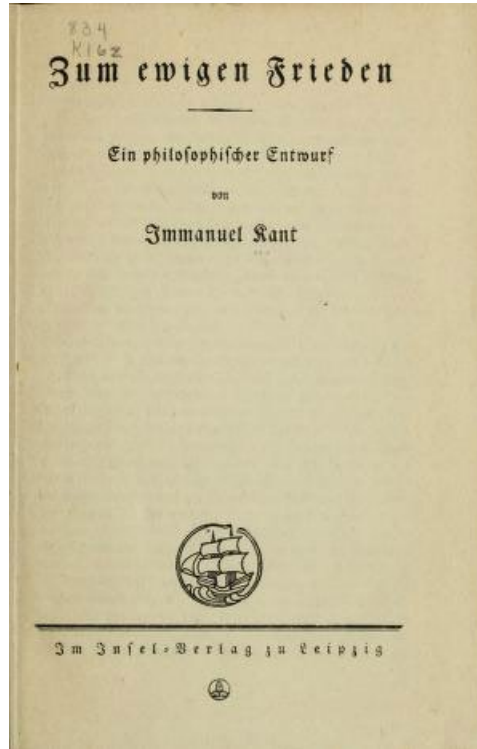
**Françoise Bonardel**

Philosopher and writer, professor emerita at the university of La Sorbonne, France.

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## PACIFICATION OF HEARTS AND MINDS: PREREQUISITE OR CONSEQUENCE OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE?

In this essay, Françoise Bonardel analyses the problem of human conflict related to cultural differences and the conditions to create authentic inter-cultural dialogue that might provide peace. With the help of authors like Ernst Jünger, Martin Buber and Jan Patočka, Bonardel exhumes a spiritual dimension that cuts across the progressive wasteland of a post-modern culture divided between technocrats and brainless consumers. In this way, she proposes a re-direction of culture based on the ennoblement of the human being and an increasing awareness of the challenge that multiple identities represent.



Immanuel Kant. Cover of the book *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795).  
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

No one can seriously disavow Kant's introduction to his perpetual peace project with these words: "No conclusion of peace should be taken as valid, if a secret reservation provides substance for future war"<sup>1</sup>. Addressed mainly to warmongering countries, could and should these remarks similarly apply to cultures whose increasingly frequent dialogue assumes a remedial figure for the inter-communal conflicts that jeopardise the unity of humankind and the ideal of fraternity meant to put an end to such fratricidal struggles? In theory, although there is no doubt about it, two reasons cause me nevertheless to doubt that the absence of any such "reservation" suffices to make dialogue between cultures a factor for peace.

The first is that Kant subordinated the possibility of any such "perpetual peace" to what has remained a providential view of Universal History, at the centre of which the imperatives of practical reason were assumed to lead humankind to become a community of goodwill, autonomous and disinterested. Replacing this eschatological view of History with a history approached scientifically in a secular manner, can modern societies still accomplish the unifying and pacifying mission to which Nature, according to Kant, has predisposed human reason? Sullied by nameless horrors, the history of the twentieth century has moreover made us sceptical with regard to the hope of the Age of Enlightenment that the exercise of rationality could, in itself, be a peacemaker.

The second of my doubts is the fact that Kant himself hardly had any illusion about human aptitude to respond unconditionally to this imperative: “From timber as crooked as that of which man is made, nothing totally straight can be cut”, he wrote, adding, “All that Nature imposes on us is to draw closer to this Idea<sup>2</sup>”. This leads us to note that the “secret reservation” posing an obstacle to perpetual peace is not that of States alone, signing peace treaties concealing the germ of future war, as has often been said of the Treaty of Versailles. It is ascribable to man himself, in whom subsists that fault from which Christian authors derive original sin, heavy to bear of course, but quite convenient after all with regard to the difficulties found by present-day progressives in providing a rational explanation of human fallibility: man would like peace, but he makes war. We consequently need to ascribe responsibility to a breakdown in reason in its quest for rationality, or need to take into account the tissue of unconscious motivations sabotaging whatever the conscience feels it can do to pacify man beset by multiple passions.

In teaching us to take into account the cloudy game of the unconscious, psychoanalysis demands, in this connection, on the threshold of any dialogue with others or with ourselves, that we ask *who* is actually speaking and who is playing the role of “subject” within these entities that we call cultures: political leaders, social actors, the masses, cultivated élites? Any culture speaking with a single voice – the polyphony brought about by democracy, in itself a good thing – also complicates the representational game, which often leads to a blurring of the message. What do politicians

really understand, for example, of the dialogue of men of culture that might influence their action in favour of peace? Now, assuming that a satisfactory response can be given to this preliminary question and that dialogue takes place, the fact remains that a lasting – or even perpetual – peace can only be considered a mere cessation of hostilities, not even the relatively well-demarcated pacific coexistence between entities, but as a long *process of pacification* leading, in the best of cases, to the definitive extinction of tensions between individuals, countries or cultures.

Can we then in such a connection separate culture as a collective entity endowed with a specific way of life and mentality from the “formation” (*Bildung*<sup>3</sup>) process of individuals, also known as “culture”<sup>4</sup>? Furthermore, we cannot hide the fact that nowadays we Westerners are forced to take on and manage a double burden, for better or worse: our guilty conscience over colonisation carried out in the name of “civilisation” and, more generally, the fact that Western rationality, in spreading its economic and technical ascendancy over the world, risks leading it to its ruin. We must also, however, recover from the trauma caused by the fact that European culture has proven incapable of stopping Nazi barbarism, coming moreover from a country of high culture, just as it is disarmed when confronted by Marxist totalitarianism, supported by a large part of Western intelligentsia. Can we pretend that this double heritage no longer weighs on dialogue between cultures even within Europe itself, and *a fortiori* in Europe’s relations with the rest of the world?

On this perspective, I should like to dwell on

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Man would like peace, but he makes war.

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some of the main points of Ernst Jünger's meditation on peace in 1943<sup>5</sup>, at a time when Germany's defeat was already looming. His remarks are those of a warrior, and that is what to my mind makes them so striking in any search for a lasting peace of hearts and minds. They are also the remarks of a man of great culture, the heir of a long tradition of thought relating to the humane education of the individual and the author of another meditation, no less remarkable, on the mind's resistance to barbarism: *On the Marble Cliffs* (1938). Here Jünger is poles apart from Romain Rolland extolling pacifism in "*Above the Battle*" first (1914), then in a number of other writings. Although the moral and spiritual grandeur of pacifism is undeniable, its weakness is that of behaving as though hearts and minds are already sufficiently pacified for a definitive turning away from war. Jünger wrote on this subject in *At the Wall of Time*: "Humanistic theories, albeit derived from the primordial image of a mode of peace, lead as little as any others to world peace<sup>6</sup>". Now pacifism claims to be the quintessence of humanism in affirming its desire for peace at any price, without assuring this requisite clearly enounced by Jünger: "To succeed, the struggle against nihilism must first be pursued in every man's heart<sup>7</sup>". Let us dwell briefly on this point.

If we take the word "nihilism" in its most usual sense – to annihilate, to destroy, liberating Thanatos, the death drive – any war triggers the triumph of one form of nihilism or another by triggering the desire to annihilate the enemy. We also know however that Jünger, in this case close to Heidegger and and in a lesser degree to Nietzsche – saw nihilism as the force of self-destruction leading the West to its decline, and with it all the peoples of the Earth, insisting on its values or rather, on calculating rationality, which is more easily exportable, but which, alone, does not represent the whole of European or Western culture. Of their

respective converging analyses I will simply mention the conclusion, which is suitable to clarify my argument: stretching its shadow over the planet, nihilism places mankind in a state of permanent war, a war that is latent and dares not speak its name. Here we have a new form of *polemos*, combat, confrontation, the daily reality of which passes unperceived, but whose action corrupts hearts and minds, continuously "mobilised" to respond to the dictates of Technology and the imperatives of a consumer society.

Is not the first task of culture in the humane education of human beings that of tempering the inner resonance of that call to "infinite mobilisation", to use Peter Sloterdijk's expression<sup>8</sup>? What result can be expected from a dialogue of cultures at their highest level of achievement and representation when the citizens of post-modern societies are conditioned in parallel from their earliest youth with a view to this kind of competition, including – if necessary – aggression? When adolescents lose their bearings and find nothing abnormal in killing for possession of a territory, a packet of cigarettes or a jacket? No man of culture in serene dialogue with his equals can ignore that the ghettos of our consumer society have become, for reasons other than those of the Tsarist era, as sordid as those painted by Maxim Gorky.

From Jünger's meditation, I retain a second idea that is paradoxical at first sight: that peace can only be prepared between "war-hardened" persons, which does not mean that one must necessarily have experienced war to be worthy of that name, but refers to a type of experience rendering each person capable of doing his utmost – including giving his life if need be – to defend what in his eyes is not negotiable: the dignity of human beings, wherever it is threatened or scorned. This makes us think that a lasting peace may be possible between adversaries with mutual respect and even esteem,





Sculpture of Ernst Jünger by Jevgenij Kulikov (1994). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

rather than between false-friends united by a common fear of conflict or out of interest in the preservation of their assets, as designated by the old expression *paix des braves*. So, who nowadays *are* the *braves* capable of promoting peace, if not men of culture, sufficiently “war-hardened” by their confrontation with works of high ethical and spiritual standards to have no further need to prove their valiance in war?

In turn, this expected call merits two remarks: we speak spontaneously of human dignity as though there were some unanimity among cultures on this subject. Nothing of the sort: each culture determines the level beyond which man ceases in their eyes to be “human”. A man “hardened” to gathering honey on Himalayan mountainsides at the risk of his life should, in theory, be capable of dialoguing with the

Kamikaze offering his life for such and such a cause, or the anonymous hero who dives into the water to save someone. Experience teaches us that being ready to risk one’s life is not enough to give rise to dialogue, and being hardened to contact with the greatest adversities is only a factor for peace if such valiance permits a *common horizon* to be perceived by the different cultures, liable to become a shared space between human beings; such a horizon has long been drawn by the West, in the certainty of giving the world the best of itself, but faced with the need to convert into a peace mission a civilising vocation till then founded on the universality of reason.

Now, no conversion of this kind is possible without the individual pacification to which I referred at the outset: “It is man’s hell”, writes Jünger elsewhere, “that projects itself into the

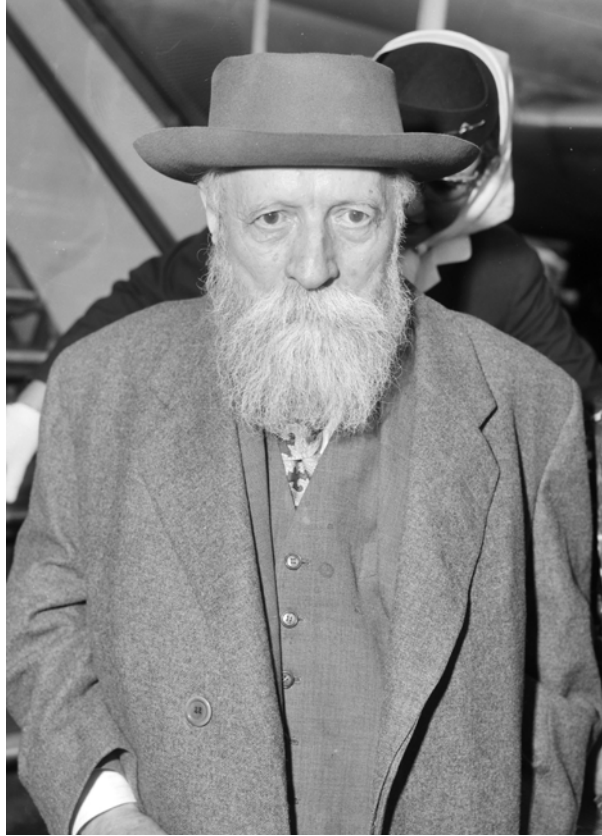
image of the world, just as inner serenity can be recognised by outward peace<sup>9</sup>.” What could world leaders effectively do in calling for a new war, if no one followed them? Absolutely nothing! It is consequently illusory to assume that mankind, apparently united by commercial globalisation, but without any previous psychological and spiritual pacification, would be ready to live in peace for long. The world’s current situation proves it: conflicts are increasingly tribal and violence is on the point of corrupting that place of peace that ought to remain its school. It is here that all those belonging to the so-called “cultural” life are called upon to mobilise and make pacification an educational priority, so that peace may reign, not among brainless consumers, but among men of good will “hardened” by culture. Now, such pacification is to my way of thinking illusory unless it is based on a humane education that has at its highest level a desire for excellence, reminding the individual of what constitutes his true humanity.

This is therefore the first condition that I would formulate concerning possible dialogue between cultures: that they have not abandoned their concern for the ennoblement of the human being – the “care of the soul”, which, following Plato, we find in the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka<sup>10</sup> – but that it is subordinated to the realisation of an imperative for pacification and not vulgar competition. Such moreover has always been the effective work of all great cultures that have left a lasting mark on the history of mankind, although nowadays its transmission is parasitised not only by the subculture programmed for the masses, conquered by the artificial paradises of consumption, but also by the imperialism of political and religious groups that consider the State as the most enterprising of merchants, and God as an almighty warlord. No dialogue with any lasting collective effect can be brought about by men of culture if a split is made

between culture as a way of life and system of values of a community and the “formation” through which every human being becomes capable of acquiring a humanising personal identity, open to universalism.

We are also well aware however that each culture has its own idea of the humane education it intends to dispense, and that a child integrated from an early age in a Buddhist monastery will never become the same man as one who has entered a kindergarten in a European city, and *a fortiori* as one trained to salute his country’s flag every morning before going to work in the factory or the fields. Here intercultural dialogue collides with a major obstacle, and the humanitarian “right of intervention” on which the West prides itself, flying to rescue child prostitutes or women reduced to slavery, claims a universality that is far from unanimous. Should acknowledgement of this right be an indispensable prerequisite for dialogue, or should one hope that any dialogue, once opened, will end up endorsing such a right? In this connection, the Western position is delicate if it is desired that recognition of a right to dignity, inseparable from the human condition, should not be deemed an expression of a new imperialism at the point where cultures define man differently as a human being.

I come now to the very notion of “dialogue” as used in the West, without – in my opinion – taking sufficiently into account the fact that the cultures with which dialogue is worthwhile are precisely those that do not attribute to dialogue the value that has been attributed to it in the West since Socrates made it the condition of the progress of rational thought in his quest for truth. This clearly does not mean that Westerners are themselves always capable of dialogue! There is, however, nothing more stabilising than what for them is the essential tool for any pacific relationship between communities, immediately rejected by those



Martin Buber, image from the Dutch National Archives, The Hague, Fotocollectie Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

for whom dialogue is a sign of weakness, unworthy of a man capable of asserting himself by means other than words. By what right do Westerners trained to dialogue – reasonably well it is assumed – impose it as a condition of rapprochement between cultures, some of whom, it would seem, in no way aspire to it, except – increasingly - for economic ends? Inherited from Western universalism and reinforced by globalisation, rapprochement as the result of dialogue is far from being an ideal shared by all the peoples that constitute mankind.

At the same time, do Westerners themselves always agree on what constitutes the nature of dialogue? Doubtless, we consider that

dialogue only exists when the other side is really listened to: what Martin Buber termed “authentic dialogue”, to distinguish it from pseudo-dialogue, which is solely a pretext for monologue, and “technical dialogue” which, as Buber says, “is inspired solely by the pressing need for practical agreement”<sup>11</sup>. Buber himself, however, bearer of the dialogal spirit of Judaism albeit professing an individualistic type of philosophy, did not conceive of dialogue in the Socratic manner: as a way, benevolent and ironical by turns, of driving his interlocutor in his defensive positions to the point of making him deliver a truth transcending the limits of his individuality. Clearly, not all dialogues have a vocation to put such maieutics into prac-

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Each culture involved in the need for dialogue is nowadays threatened by at least one of those two extremisms that are, on the one hand, religious fundamentalism, a new avatar of political totalitarianism, and on the other, a massive Westernisation of ways of living and thinking.

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tice and, when not purely technical, most are often merely conversations between cultivated persons, consultations between good companions or friends.

In the true sense of the word, dialogue is only effective when the *logos* that gives meaning to the *dia* (through, by) circulates between the protagonists. Dialogue is only possible between those who share the same conception of *logos*, and that is not even clear among philosophers! Dialogue is thus only possible in a common language, or at least if the partners are equally convinced that they have to create one that allows effective communication. Here I am not speaking only of the idiom used for the dialogue, but rather of that “language” that is human culture, producing peculiar forms that have taken shape in one cultural community or another. We must also recognise that, although scientific and technical rationalism has largely delivered us from the problem of having to dialogue to seek for ourselves those truths whose discovery lies henceforth in the hands of “specialists”, the question still remains as to whether the language of culture has to align itself with that of science to the point of losing its specificity, which is to weave disinterested bonds between human beings with a view to a respective refining that alone can pacify and thus bring them together.

Speaking spontaneously of a “dialogue between cultures”, we usually assume rather too rapidly that this plural guarantees the respect for alterity without which any search for dialogue is vain. Again, such cultures must be “cul-

tivated” and exist as entities with a well-defined identity, created over the centuries, yet nevertheless open to encounter, without which there can be no dialogue; they must also be able to integrate within their heritage a minimum of novelty and diversity, without needing to align themselves with Western post-modernism and treat it as a veritable cult of whatever is “new”. Each culture involved in the need for dialogue is nowadays threatened by at least one of those two extremisms that are, on the one hand, religious fundamentalism, a new avatar of political totalitarianism, and on the other, a massive Westernisation of ways of living and thinking that, unfortunately, almost always retain the most superficial aspects of what has produced, and continues to produce, the grandeur of European culture.

A new balance must therefore be found for each of them, between retrograde entrenchment in the supposedly timeless values of the tradition they feel they belong to, and a brutal cosmopolitisation of their ways of living and thinking that, supplanting what the Ancients called “cosmopolitism”<sup>12</sup>, leads to a loss of identity or to a sort of “combination” of identities, of which Dariush Shayegan provides an example in speaking of the “cultural schizophrenia” his Iranian contemporaries are obliged to live in<sup>13</sup>. Although numerous persons around the world nowadays realise that they have multiple identities without necessarily being schizophrenic, this is because they have drawn the best of what each culture can give them: they have even seen their creativity strengthened by it.

Far from being a seductive fashion marked by facility, the “cultural intermixture” now in vogue multiplies the challenges to which both individuals and cultures are called upon to “harden” themselves.

No dialogue can consequently take place between cultures that have lost their entire “spiritual” dimension, in that the mind remains the best form of resistance to the reification of consciousness, as shown by thinkers as different as Jünger and Adorno. The opposition between culture and religion itself will cease to apply when leaders of the major religions show that they are more vigilant than they have been in the recent past. Contemporary history effectively teaches us that rationality can be diverted from its pacifying mission, perverted and instrumentalised to the extent of serving as the armed wing of the worst monstrosities ever committed by mankind. It also teaches us that the mind of a people can be taken over on the pretext of its ethnic or cultural specificity, or of some inspiration from on high, to exercise world domination. Warned of this double danger, are we nevertheless going to turn away from both one and the other? The task of men of culture is rather to assist the mind once more to inspire reason which, without it, would be blind, and to assist each culture in claiming its own “mind” in order to take part in building peace among human beings.

In this connection, the Mediterranean has a specific role to play in intercultural dialogue. Any traveller through the Mediterranean instinctively feels the artificiality of the partition of countries that shatters their unity: the same climate, the same way of life, above all the same light that inspires both philosophers and poets; should they not overcome the dissensions created by History? “A configuration discernible by the heart, that is what makes the Mediterranean spirit”, says Jean Grenie<sup>14</sup>, suggesting that contemporary man can be “renewed” through the popular wisdom of the Mediterranean. One should re-read these admirable pages in their grandeur and simplicity – those two vectors of Mediterranean inspiration – to regain hope in the aptitude of cultures for dialogue, at least around the Mediterranean, and to understand the lesson lavished on these lands placed under the aegis of the same Mother. Does not intercultural dialogue begin when each can freely question the other in the shade of a fig-tree or olive which, his property for centuries or perhaps become so more recently, is also the tutelary tree of a whole community? The community of beings who have received their “formation” as men of the Mediterranean, which has nourished and raised them, bringing out the best of themselves and in doing so has cultivated them. •



- 1 Kant, *Vers la paix perpétuelle*, trad. J.-F. Poirier et F. Proust, Paris, GF-Flammarion, 1991, p. 76. (German version : Immanuel Kant. *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf*. First edition Königsberg, 1795).
- 2 Kant, *Idée pour une histoire universelle d'un point de vue cosmopolitique*, in *Histoire et politique*, trad. G. Leroy, Paris, J. Vrin, 1999, p. 93. (German version: Immanuel Kant. *Ideen zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*. First edition Leipzig, 1784).
- 3 Editor's note: In the English translation of this essay, the German term Bildung is translated in some cases as "formation" (reproducing Bonardel's French choice in a literal way) and in other cases as "humane education" (as translated in the English version of Werner Jaeger's book *Paideia*), depending on context.
- 4 Cf. in this connection F. Bonardel, *Des Héritiers sans passé. Essai sur la crise de l'identité culturelle européenne*, Chatou, Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2010.
- 5 Ernst Jünger, *La Paix*, trad. Banine et A. Petitjean, Paris, La Table Ronde, 1948. (German version: Ernst Jünger. *Der Friede. Ein Wort an die Jugend Europas. Ein Wort an die Welt*. First edition Amsterdam, 1946).
- 6 Ernst Jünger, *Le Mur du Temps*, trad. H. Thomas, Paris, Gallimard, 1963, p. 125. (German version: Ernst Jünger. *An der Zeitmauer*. First edition Stuttgart, 1959).
- 7 *La Paix*, p. 131. (Der Friede, see footnote 4).
- 8 Peter Sloterdijk, *La Mobilisation infinie*, trad. H. Hildenbrand, Paris, Christian Bourgois, 2000. (Peter Sloterdijk. *Kopernikanische Mobilmachung und ptolemäische Abrüstung: ästhetischer Versuch*. Frankfurt am Main, 1987).
- 9 Ernst Jünger, *La Paix*, p. 102. (Der Friede, see footnote 4).
- 10 Jan Patočka, *Platon et l'Europe: séminaire privé du semestre d'été*, trad. E. Abrams. [Series: La nuit surveillée]. Paris, 1983 (Jan Patočka. *Platón a Evropa*. 1973); *L'Europe après l'Europe*, trad. E. Abrams, Paris, Verdier, 2007 (Jan Patočka. *Evropa a doba poevropská*. Praha, 1992).
- 11 Martin Buber, *La vie en dialogue*, trad. J. Loewenson-Lavi, Paris, Aubier : Éditions Montaigne, 1959, p. 125. (Martin Buber. *Dialogisches Leben : gesammelte philosophische und pädagogische Schriften*. Zürich, 1947).
- 12 Cf. in this connection Ulrich Beck, *Qu'est-ce que le cosmopolitisme ?* transl. A. Duthoo, Paris, Aubier, 2006. (Ulrich Beck. *Was ist Globalisierung ? Irrtümer des Globalismus □ Antworten auf Globalisierung*. Erste Auflage. Frankfurt am Main, 2007).
- 13 Dariush Shayegan, *Le Regard mutilé*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1989. Republished in 2007 with the title *Schizophrenie culturelle*.
- 14 Jean Grenier, *Inspirations méditerranéennes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1961, p. 90. This was also the title of the lecture given in 1933 by Paul Valéry who ended with these words: "Never, and nowhere, in so restricted an area and in so short a space of time, has it been possible to observe such a fermentation of minds, such a production of riches", *Variété III*, Paris, Gallimard, 1936, p. 265.



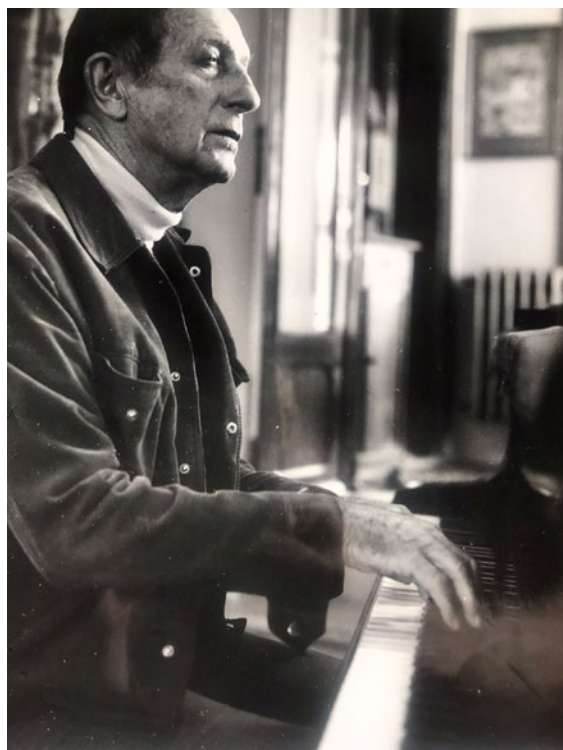
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**Alain Daniélou**

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## INDIAN AND WESTERN MUSIC FIRST PART

This article, which is partially reproduced from Daniélou's notes in the Zagarolo archives (with some editorial adjustments), was published in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1949. With his distinctive clarity and precision, Daniélou treats the language and the systems of music, Greek and Indian music history, as well as some important questions of musical technique. This article also expresses Daniélou's personal reflection on music, according to which the distinction between "India" and "the West" in matters of musical theory should be replaced by the conceptual opposition between "modal" and "harmonic" music. This last aspect builds up the core of Daniélou's normative approach to musical systems as well as his attempt to retrieve the specific value of Indian classical music in the face of what he called "the harmonic pollution" of the modern West.



Alain Daniélou in 1981, photo by Jacques Cloarec.

### Preliminaries: Different Languages

I was kindly asked to speak about Indian and Western music. This subject is not a very easy one. Musical systems differ more deeply than people usually realize and to explain their differences it will be necessary for us to make a general survey of musical history as well as to enter the rather complex theory of music. I shall try to do this as briefly and clearly as I can and hope to be forgiven if I may not be able to avoid completely the technical terminology of music.

But first, I think that the very title given to this talk is wrong. Music is not Eastern or Western. It may happen that at a given time a particular musical system is given preference in a particular country, but this is usually a temporary

phenomenon. It would be more accurate for us to speak of music as modal or harmonic. This would put our enquiry on a sounder basis, and we may well discover that there are numerous musical elements found in Western countries which, in fact, belong to the modal or so-called Indian system. Further, a certain use of polyphony is not at all unknown to Indian musical theory and was extensively used in India at a time when it was still unheard of in Europe.

Before we can compare two systems of music, or two languages, we first have to find out what common ground they may have. In the case of languages, we find that certain types of speech differ only in their vocabulary, or their sound, but make use of a similar grammatical system. Such is, for example, the case of the Indo-European group of languages. But if we want to

compare languages belonging to different families, such as Chinese and Italian, we find far less common points. It is only after we have determined the different forms through which an idea may be expressed, that we can attempt to translate, or, if the differences are too great, to transpose the ideas from one language into another.

### Music As A Form Of Language

Music does not differ from language in its principle. In fact, the ancient Sanskrit theorists always considered music as a form of language. Music is but a means of expressing emotions or ideas through sounds and relations of sounds, which is also the characteristic of language. Just as there are different kinds of language, there are also different kinds of music. There are several types of grammar which cannot be used at the same time in one language. Similarly, the different types of music may be incompatible. Languages are not usually at the same time agglutinative and inflectional, just as music may not be both harmonic and modal.

A question which has always faced mankind since the time of the tower of Babel is whether it would not be better to have one common language for all, one common music for all. But whatever the advantages of a common means of understanding, there are qualities inherent to each type of language, and a great part of the treasure of human thought and culture would disappear if some of the great languages were to vanish, because the modes of expression, the ideas inherent to those languages, can never be exactly translated into another tongue. There are for example many subtle ways of expression in Bengali that can never be rendered in Hindi or English.

Contrary to common belief, music is *not* a word-less language which can be understood by all beings. No bird seems to enjoy the song of another kind of bird. The perception we have

of musical sounds is, of necessity, based on acoustic phenomena which must be common to all beings endowed with a similar system of hearing. Yet these common acoustic properties are used in each system in a particular and exclusive manner, and it requires special training to recognize them. This training, necessary to understand a particular musical system, is no less long and tedious than is the study of a foreign language.

The hope that the gentle sounds of music may soften all hearts and create understanding between men and nations is unfortunately unfounded. Even if the members of the United Nations were to sing to one another instead of making speeches, they would not understand one another better for that. On the contrary, they would be likely to irritate one another even more deeply.

### Four types of musical system

In the world today, we know of four completely different types of musical system which make use of distinct properties of sound. These systems can be called the cyclic system, the modal system, the harmonic system and the melodic system. Chinese music is of the cyclic type, classical Indian music is modal, modern Western music is harmonic, and most of the popular music of all countries comes within the melodic system.

The cyclic system is in a way the fundamental, if not the original one. It makes use of no interval in which may figure a prime number higher than 3 or a power of 3. Its basic interval is what we call a fifth, that is the interval from Sa to Pa, or C to G, which corresponds to the ratio 3/2. Cyclic music utilizes the peculiar properties of successions of fifths as the basic of its musical language. Its main outward characteristic is the pentatonic (or 5-note) scale. This pentatonic scale, known in India as *rāga bhūpālī*, is the only mode of *rāga* used in cyclic

music, where the basic means of expression depends on changes of tonic and variations in pitch.

The modal system is the most elaborate example in classical Indian music. Its most characteristic feature is the permanence of a fixed sound called the tonic. The musical or expressive value of all the other sounds is here envisaged exclusively as depending on their relationship with the tonic. All kinds of intervals can thus be formed which are further assembled in what we may call an oblique structure, so as to create an *indefinite variety* of modes or *rāgas*.

The harmonic system is, in many of its features, a comparatively recent development. In this system, the different sounds are played together in groups which are called chords and which are so arranged as to form given intervals in relation to a lower sound called the *fundamental* of the chord. The characteristic of this system is that a given pitch of sound can convey a different expression according to the position it occupies in relation to the fundamental notes of different chords.

The above-mentioned systems represent the main cultured ways of music at present in use. There is, however, a further type of system which is very common and may be termed the melodic system. It is outwardly akin to modal music, but in this case the memory functions differently, in what we may term a horizontal rather than a vertical way. Further the tonic plays a less important role in it, each note taking its expression from its relation to the previous and the following notes.

### Melodic And Modal Form

Maybe I should make the last point clearer. In a melodic form of music, the shape of the song is fixed, that is, you can learn the melody of a song and sing it perfectly, without knowing which note is a Sa or a Ga, the tonic or the third. The memory functions horizontally from one

note to another. In modal music, on the other hand, the group of notes on which the melody will move is fixed and memorized vertically as one unit. Now, when singing a mode or a *rāga*, the musician concentrates on the scale. The melody cannot be fixed. The musician cannot know exactly through which melodic contours he moves around this fixed backbone that is the scale. If he concentrates on the melody, he will lose the *rāga*. He acts just like the artist, who, while making a drawing, concentrates on the profile which will come out of the page. He cannot follow every circumvolution of the pencil. He does not know what movements his pencil makes. Such is the case for the melody of the modal musician.

Melodic music has a far less important place than modal music so far as musical theory is concerned because it can never produce a very highly evolved music. The mistake underlying most Western interpretations of Indian, Arab and Greek music has been that they confused modal music and melodic music and could therefore understand nothing of the theory or the practice of music in those countries where music happened to be of the modal type.

### Some Remarks On Indian History

The older system in India is modal. While the harmonic system appears to be a comparatively recent development, both cyclic and modal music had a very advanced theory and practice in quite ancient times. Probably the older type of cultured music was modal, although the existence of cyclic music seems not to have been unknown to early modal theorists whose works have survived.

A few centuries before Christ, the music of India and of the known parts of Europe was of the modal type. In fact, most of Greek theory and instruments came originally from India through the Middle East. There is a certain amount of musical evidence to show that a





Large portrait of Alain Daniélou by Mac Avoy, photo by Jacques Cloarec.

civilization, which at one time seems to have extended from India to Egypt and the island of Crete before the Aryan invasions, had already a very advanced art of music and elaborate musical instruments. At a later period, the Shai-va cults, which gave a very great importance to outdoor dancing and singing, were again imported into Greece and Egypt. Megasthenes, who came to India in 302 B.C., reports that the Indians were great experts in music and dancing, and that they counted 6000 years from the time when Dionysus (who for him could be equated with Shiva) taught them music, till the time of Alexander. These dates exactly tally with those given in the old *Śaiva Purāṇas*. Meanwhile, the Aryan diatonic scale and the system of music expounded in the *Gāndharva Veda* had also found their way into Greece. The conflict between the old Dravidian and the Vedic-Aryan music is apparent in Greek musical

theory, as it is in the Sanskrit musical works of the early period. And the basic scales of these two main schools, or *Matas*, of Indian music, the Dravidian and the Aryan, became known to Greek theorists as the chromatic and the diatonic. The enharmonic division, or scale of the *Śrutis*, which was the common theoretical basis of both systems, is practically identical in Greek and in Indian theory.

The musical history of India is linked with the whole history of civilization. Through the study of musical development in India, as well as through the development of other arts and sciences, we may be able to reach conclusions which will be an asset in defining with more precision those parts of political and literary history that have remained so far ill-determined. We have here to be aware that musical tradition is extraordinarily permanent. People can change their country, their language,

their dress, their food, and still come back to the same musical forms that are more suited to the peculiarities of their ears and temperament. Musical forms are seen to survive, often unnoticed, through a different theory, in the midst of a different system, to reappear again unchanged after centuries.

A recent and most brilliant example is that of Tagore's songs, which represent a melodic form in the garb of a modal one. They are purely in the ancient tradition of Bengali music and are not *rāgas*, although they appear to use the scale of some (usually mixed) *rāgas*. They are not influenced by Western music, either, as some people believe, although they make use of some adapted Western tunes. Modal theory cannot account for their expression. This is what the common man feels when he says that they have a "peculiar", undefinable charm.

The mediaeval and later books on music speak of four *Matas*, or systems of music, each referring to a basically different school. This can be interpreted in two ways. Either these *Matas* represent different ways of classification while the art itself remains practically the same, or they may refer to actually different musical systems.

In practice, even today, and in spite of mutual influences, we find four different types of music in India, which we may call from their most representative elements: the Dravidian modal school with its basic chromatic, the Aryan modal school with its basic diatonic, the Melodic school predominant in Bengal and among many ancient peoples of Central India and the Himalayas, and also a school of cyclic pentatonic music of Mongolian origin, which is found in Nepal, Assam and a few other regions. These represent fundamentally different systems. The fact that they could remain distinct, in spite of the efforts made by theorists for centuries to link them into a common theory, highlights the remarkable tenacity of popular culture in its will to resist the assertions of

insufficiently learned theorists, a phenomenon observed in every country and at every period. From mediaeval times, the tendency of Indian theorists has been to confuse the different *Matas*. With the consolidation of the predominance of Sanskritic culture, the writings of all the ancient *Ācāryas* were pooled together, and patient attempts were made with the help of linguistic artifice to show that there was no contradiction between them. This definitely obscured musical theory. The largest and most typical work of this period is the celebrated *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* of Śārṅgadeva, a book written in the thirteenth century as a sort of general treatise on musical science.

### Indian Music Books Through The Ages

If we want a clear view of the theory of the original systems, we have to fall back upon earlier works. Unfortunately, many of these are now lost. Yet, with patient labour, it is possible to reconstruct part of their theory from the extensive quotations available in later books.

Indian books on music can be divided into three periods. The first or ancient period, which we may call pre-Buddhist, includes the theory of music as it can be traced in the Vedas and the Upavedas, as well as the music referred to in the earlier Purāṇas, parts of the Epics, and generally all authors who appear to be anterior to Pāṇini – who was approximately a contemporary of Gautama Buddha.

It may be noted here that the cautious modern scholarly method, which consists in dating works as late as possible, may be very misleading. There is no doubt that practically no ancient work survives which has not been reshaped in some way or other in later centuries. But to consider these works, as a whole, to be as late as their last reshaping, simply because some late additions are found in them, gives a wrong historical perspective. We are equally falsifying history when we consider the later parts of these works as being early, or their ear-

ly parts as being late. I do not quite understand why it seems to be deemed a sort of virtue for a historian to take great risks in dating ancient works much too late, while it is considered a fearful sin to take slight risks in dating parts of a work too early. So far as music is concerned, we can take present historical conventions rather light-heartedly, since we have means of deciding the age of a given document which are different and safer than linguistic considerations. Such are, for example, the basic scales, the instruments mentioned, the authors quoted, the appearing or disappearing of particular technical terms and their use.

After the early period comes what we may term the Buddhist age. It extends approximately from 500 B.C. to the fifth century A.D. and represents the literature on music contemporary to Kauṭilya and Kālidāsa, Amara Siṃha and Paṭaṅjali. Then comes the mediaeval age with the commentators of Bharata, that is, Udbhaṭa in the eighth century, Lollaṭa and Śaṅkuka in the ninth century. In the tenth century we have the monumental work of Abhinava Gupta, in the eleventh that of Nānya Deva and in the thirteenth century that of Śaṅga Deva – and we should not forget the contemporary commentary on the *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* by Siṃha Bhūpāla, the protector of Śaṅga Deva.

The later Sanskrit literature on music from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century is

quite rich, but is generally of lesser theoretical interest. The works of this later age endlessly quote the definitions of earlier works and try to explain away the theoretical difficulties born of earlier confusion. In this respect, a special mention should be made of Veṅkaṭa Makhin, who, in the seventeenth century, reformed South Indian music. We are often told that South Indian music is more conservative and represents Indian music in its purest and more ancient form. This is probably very far from being true. The present system of South Indian music is a mixture of melodic and modal forms, and its theory was profoundly altered by several theorists, particularly by Veṅkaṭa Makhin, who systematized the reforms started by his father Govinda Dīkṣita, a protégé of Mahārāja Raghunātha Nāyaka of Tanjore.

In an endeavour to restore the ancient theory and explain away the contradictions of earlier authors, Veṅkaṭa Makhin made a beautiful and clever blend of the conflicting systems and deeply altered the theory of South Indian music. The case is quite different in the north, where in spite of foreign invasions and alleged influences, the music, possibly partly thanks to the loss of its theory in days of insufficient learning, remained, through mere technical tradition, remarkably faithful to old definitions. •

