

IIM IN ACTION

ACTIVITIES AT IIM

1. A Series of Lectures on *Life, Death and Suffering. Views of Different Spiritual and Religious Traditions* (March-April 2007)

Since the meaning of life, death and suffering derives from specific cultural and religious parameters that shape it, the IIM has organized during the Spring a series of conferences open to the general public on the theme: “Life, death and suffering: View of different spiritual and religious traditions”.

In this series we have sought to understand how different religious and spiritual traditions conceive life, death and suffering, and hence, how these conceptions influence the real life of the people. We have also explored how to take into consideration that influence within the framework of psychosocial and health-care intervention among the sick and dying.

The series covered four spiritual and religious traditions: Haitian Voodoo, Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity. This, within the perspective of psychosocial and health-care intervention.

Voodoo (March 28th)

Mr. Joseph Augustin, theologian and expert on Haitian Voodoo opened his talk by offering some key elements to interpret Voodoo. He insisted, first on the fact that Voodoo must not be considered as the work of the devil, nor as a wild reality nor as a practice related to magic. He also explained that the apparently secret character of Voodoo practices is the result of the persecution of the slaves and of their practices in the past. In order to protect themselves, they have surrounded these practices with secrecy, and this has allowed them to continue practicing a spirituality that gave them strength.

It is a thousands of years old practice that existed in Black Africa and among the Egyptians of the Pharaohs. The practice of Voodoo, is, in brief, a call upon the energies that move the universe, so that Man may find his well-being by being in tune with them. It is a matter of calling upon these energies in order to establish with them a beneficial relationship. Shango is the non-visible but existent divinity, which is infinite kindness, creator of all energies. Life, therefore, is the result of the circulation of energies that come from Shango.

Suffering, in Voodoo traditions has a concrete and precise meaning. It is not understood as an abstract reality, in terms of feeling of pain, or a mental malaise, but in relationship with a concrete sickness and the physical pain that accompanies it. In Voodoo one is very sensitive to someone else's suffering, because of a deep sense of community.

Sickness can be cured if it comes from Shango, but more difficult to cure if it comes from humans through magic. So the Houngan (the Healer) seeks to cure through searching for and applying good energy to the sick person.

Death is seen as a journey towards greater life and hence, in spite of the sadness

provoked in the community by the disappearance of someone all the friends in the neighborhood gather together to celebrate his departure. The women cook, the men play cards or domino, while those who shed tears cry out in order to mark the importance of the departed one.

Hinduism (April 4th)

Kalpana Das, Executive Director of the Intercultural Institute of Montreal, opened her talk by explaining that Hinduism is not an institutional religion, it is a way of life 4000 years old, born out of the fusion of Dravidian and Aryan traditions that came from the North. It includes a variety of practices, which, however, share a same vision of reality.

In fact in Hinduism it is the word *Dharma* that used instead of the word religion, it has diverse meanings such as, law, path or good conduct in society. It is important to note that the Indian society is cosmocentric. *Dharma* signifies cosmic order and the society is based on this cosmic or natural order.

There are many fundamental philosophical notions at the root of Hinduism. First, the notions of *Brahman*, the Ultimate Reality, and *Paramatman*, the Universal Self. These two notions do not correspond exactly to the notion of God. Then there is the *Atman* – the personal Self. Another word for that Ultimate Reality is *Prana*, the vital breath. Karma refers to the cause-effect interrelation through which every action is situated in relationship to the global order of the universe. Finally, there is the notion of *Moksha*, which refers to liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth through the dissolution of the personal Self or Atman in the Universal Self or Paramatman. There are four particular purposes of life: *Kama*, human desire, *Artha*, or material comfort; *Dharma*, good conduct within life and society, *Moksha*, ultimate liberation.

Within this framework, Life continues in a cyclical movement of beginning, end and starting over again. The life of each person is marked by the *Samskaras* or rituals of initiation at different stages of life (stage of study and formation, *Brahmacharya*, stage of marriage and family life, *Grihastha*, stage of retreat in the forest or pilgrimage *Vanaprastha*, and the last stage is renunciation and the quest for liberation *Sannyasa*).

Death is a part of the life cycle and is seen as a necessary and even desirable reality, since if I do not die, life cannot continue and be recreated. It is not a terrible thing that one must fight at any cost, but it is a passage that one must accept to embrace. Suicide is not seen as something dramatic, but it remains non-desirable. The death of a child is seen as an abnormal fact and deaths through accident are considered as non-natural deaths.

In the same sense, suffering is part of the natural rhythm of things, since life comprises inescapably suffering, whether it be related to sickness, *Roga*, or to old age, *Jara*. One must live through suffering and pain, whether it be physical, mental or spiritual. One must take into consideration that if a person is sick, the family is sick, his community also, and also there is imbalance in the cosmos in itself: the total interrelatedness.

In childhood one is educated to be detached, specially materially, through non-assertion of the individual ego and through insisting on the fact that the personal Self is not an autonomous reality, but rather a reflection of the Universal Self.

In order to deal with sickness and suffering, one can call upon different persons with precise functions: the *Vaidya* doctor for the physical body: the *Jotishi*, who treats the cosmic and astral dimension; the *Pandit*, responsible for the sacred rites; the *Guru*, the spiritual guide.

Judaism (April 11th)

Mr. Joseph Gabay approached the topic from the viewpoint of the notion of the creation of the world by God. On the 6th day of creation, God transfixed nature. Hence, the mission of Man is to transform nature into culture, building it so that God may dwell in it. One can therefore speak about a co-existence between God and man.

Suffering is seen as the result of man's lack of love in his religious practice. In Judaism, there are 613 basic commandments and each of these commandments is related to a part of the physical body. If one is suffering in one spot, one follows a precise commandment in order to obtain a cure.

Suffering's ultimate meaning is that it expresses a lack of harmony with the world and with reality as a whole. One can observe in Judaism, a clear correspondence between the functioning of the world and our actions.

Death is perceived as a reality in clear opposition to the *raison d'être* of Judaism, which is to live and celebrate life. It is an impurity. But at the same time the absurdity of death is transcended through prayer and through the awareness of the fact that at the moment of death, the soul leaves the body and the individual rebuilds himself elsewhere from one of his bones. In reality, life on earth is only a journey, which explains why cemeteries are viewed as houses of the living who are elsewhere. Suicide is not accepted as valid, since it is forbidden to despair.

Christianity (April 18th)

Robert Jacques, Doctor in Theology and pastoral agent at Saint-Eustache hospital, first presented historically Christianity's responses to the meaning of Life, Death and Suffering.

From the very beginning, Christianity has taken death and suffering very seriously, since Christ himself, through his suffering and death, has liberated Man from his sin.

This has brought him closer to the sick, by taking care of them and by developing healing practices. Christian Faith has developed through believing in Christ and in his very suffering itself. This belief presents a danger of overrating the latter per se, with all the accompanying exaggerations and abuse that would come with it. In those days, there was not much reference to sickness. St-Augustin considered it as being a result of original sin.

During the Middle Ages, one witnesses the development of the anthropological dimension of Christianity, which allows a great development of compassion as an important part of medieval Christian spirituality. Through the imitation of the suffering of Christ, one can understand and embrace human suffering.

During the Renaissance, with the Protestant Reformation, the concept of suffering as a way of imitating Christ is maintained, but salvation is no longer linked to suffering but to grace. What saves, is faith and grace, and not suffering. The Catholic Counter-reform will mitigate a lot the notion of suffering as being merit towards salvation. One then speaks – of the spiritual use of suffering, in the sense that the latter allows one to better understand the meaning of Christ’s suffering, but without considering it in itself as a way of salvation.

After this historical sketch, the speaker took up the theme of subjectivity and suffering, underlining that in Christianity, as well as in the monotheistic traditions (Judaism and Islam), the subject is a reality that is differentiated from the rest of the Universe, which is contrary to other traditions wherein the latter is included in a totality. This characteristic of differentiation, places him, as a human being, as being responsible for the evil that is committed and even subjected to.

Then, as a pastoral agent in an hospital, the speaker asked: is it possible to suffer with

the other in modernity? In order to answer properly, he asked himself if the fact of accompanying someone who is suffering stems from a quest for meaning or from a quest for a cure. He mentioned that most books on care for the sick and on spirituality deal with a quest for meaning (which is a concern of the care-givers) rather than a quest for a passage through sickness (which is a concern of the one who is being cared for). The speaker pleaded to acknowledge and to accompany the attitudes developed by the person who is sick and suffering instead of trying to impose on him some vision or meaning to his suffering.

Finally, he briefly presented five postures that one can adopt in the face of suffering and so that one can be sensitive to and vigilant as care-giver: seeking to suppress the suffering by all means available, since it is seen as a failure; seeking to master it through will power and having hold of oneself, reminding oneself that when one wants to, one can; accepting it passively, all the while adopting the role of victim; trying to dissolve it through clarity of judgment; go right through it so that it does not become destructive, all the while accepting that it is a part of the waying, but that it is not the way “per se”.

During the first talk, Agustí Nicolau-Coll, as moderator had read a few lines from the French philosopher Gustave Thibon, in the spirit of the series, which said this:

“There are two kinds of beings which are incurably devoid of nobility: those who need to be happy in order to be kind, and those who need to be unhappy in order to think of God. The noble man is the one who is made tender by suffering and happiness make him pray”. Gustave Thibon (*L’Échelle de Jacob*, p. 27, Boreal Express, 1984)

By Agusti Nicolau-Coll

2. Colloquium *Pluralism here and Elsewhere* (May 30-31, 2007)

On May 30–31, 2007, a colloquium entitled “Pluralism here and elsewhere: Quebec, Black Africa, China and in Islam,” was organized by the Intercultural Institute of Montreal, in collaboration with the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Diversity in Quebec (cridaq) and the Chair of Research on Canada, Islam, Pluralism and Globalization, University of Montreal.

The reason for organizing the Colloquium was to bring to people’s attention to the fact that in the course of centuries, different societies and cultures have developed specific social and political knowledge and practices in order to deal with cultural diversity within their respective societies. These knowledge systems and practices were developed much before the notions of law, democracy and freedom appeared and unfortunately they are most often unknown and ignored.

The colloquium’s objective was to approach in an historical perspective, practices of pluralism within these different geo-cultural regions of the world namely, Quebec, Black Africa, Native Peoples, China and in Islam. The idea was first to take an account of these diverse cultural ways of dealing with cultural diversity. The colloquium included six presentations:

- *The history of attitudes in Quebec with regard to cultural diversity: from the period of New France to the present time*, by Jacques Lacoursière, historian
- “Once upon a time the spider’s web... Considerations on some virtues of the knot” (Black Africa) by Lomomba Emongo, philosopher, Intercultural Institute of Montreal.
- *China: cultural diversity in the Chinese traditions. Ways of understanding, practical solutions* by Anna Ghiglione, Department

of Philosophy of the University of Montreal.

- *The Native Peoples: diversity a hallmark of the cosmic circle*, by Michael Rice, Mohawk, Director of the Ratihente High School at Kanasatake;
- *Islam: the Umma, a guarantee for diversity?*, by Yara El-Ghadban and Zakaria Rhani, doctoral students in anthropology at UQAM.

At the outset, Miss Kalpana Das, the Executive Director of the Intercultural Institute of Montreal (IIM), revisited the themes of the colloquium, and spoke in particular about the necessity of reflecting on the notion of interculturalism. She noted that Quebec has long been a land of immigration for new arrivals from the European culture, whose values were Judeo-Christian, but she also underlined that now and more so in the future, the immigration to Quebec will be more and more from Asia and Africa. She says it is important to recognize this pluralism, and it is urgent to ask ourselves if our conceptions of pluralism, democracy and human rights are only western concepts. She brought up the fact that in the course of history, in other cultures, radically different conceptions of pluralism have emerged. What are the consequences of these differences for modern societies, and to what measure can this constitute a problem for integrating them into this society? Miss Das brought up the fact that there are many ways of conceiving integration and underlined that it could be beneficial to draw lessons from these experiences, particularly with respect to our collective relations with “foreigners”, and also in our research of new ideas. Miss Das invited the participants to reflect on the following issues during the colloquium:

- What are the other cultural conceptions of Pluralism outside of the West?
- What are the spiritual foundations and the cosmovisions behind these approaches?

- What are their concrete practices?
- What are their social consequences?
- What are the points of convergence and divergence in relation to the West?

Miss Das closed her introductory speech by giving the example of the indigenous cultures of Canada and of Africans, who favour orality, in order to illustrate the importance of cultural differences during this colloquium.

The talks by the historian Jean Lacoursière and by the Director of the Ratihen'te High School at Kanasatake, Michael Rice, reminded us to what point the expression «old stock Quebecois» has become absurd. It has been used at first to define a given population facing immigration. While this term is used to define the descendants of the original French and English colonizers vis-à-vis the ulterior waves of immigrants coming from elsewhere in Europe, then from other continents, Mr. Rice has gently reminded us that the history of Quebec had begun long before the arrival of the first colonizers.

The historian Jacques Lacoursière, started with a jest, asking himself to what point the Province is a land of hospitality «terre d'accueil» or a land of stumbling block «terre d'écueil»? He reminded the audience that the attitude of the people of Quebec has considerably varied throughout the decades in their attitude towards immigration, as well as the cleavages through which the inhabitants of the land would define themselves. The relationships between different groups were defined by making distinctions between different indigenous people, then between them and the European newcomers, between the English and the French, but also between the Catholics, the Huguenots, the Protestants, the Jews. This reminder was important to help us understand that diversity is conceived according to many types of distinction, and that nothing is static.

Michael Rice and his commentator Pascal Galvani, professor at the Department of Human Sciences at the University of Quebec in Rimouski, have sensitized us to the different ways of conceiving the Other, which is proper to the Indigenous peoples of Canada. We were reminded of the importance of orality in the Mohawk culture, and also of the pluralism of Cosmovisions with regard to the world's myths of origin. In that community alone, many versions exist about the origins of the world, and the need to achieve a consensus about the myth of origins, was never imposed.

But the colloquium has also demonstrated the importance of taking into account the different conceptions of pluralism specific to different civilizations such as, Islam, China and Africa, as there are more and more people from these cultures choosing Quebec as their country of adoption. This is important for the present and for the future

The presentation "*Islam: the Umma, a guarantee for diversity?*", by Yara El Ghadban and Zakaria Rhani, have evoked the diversity of cultures within the Islamic world, and has thus called into question the dangerous simplification made by radical islamists and their adversaries: the idea of a united Islam. A good part of the discussion focused on the management of diversity regarding relationships with the «dhimmis» (the people of the Book, namely the Christians and the Jews), and took up the issue of secularity (laïcité). The latter sparked numerous interventions on the part of the audience; notably on the "Millet", which dealt with the diverse communities within the Ottoman Empire. Some participants also raised issues with the occultation of African Islam, and with the acceptance of secularity (laïcité) as a factor of integration of newly arrived Muslim immigrants within the host society by the new immigrant Muslims, as only 15% of them frequent the Mosque.

The third presentation “*China: cultural diversity in the Chinese traditions: modes of intelligibility, practical solutions*”, by Anna Ghiglione, professor of Philosophy at the University of Montreal, and commented by André Laliberté, also sparked comments regarding the difficulty of managing community relations. This time, what was criticized was not so much a presumed incompatibility of Chinese culture in its foundations, but the political culture of the People’s Republic of China, which is seen by some participants as not knowing how to manage diversity except through authoritarian methods.

The last talk “*Once upon a time, the spider’s web... some considerations on the virtues of the knot*” given by Lomomba Emongo, and commented by Gilles Bibeau, professor at the Department of Anthropology, University of Montreal, presented another conception of diversity management. Here the question of diversity was evoked by highlighting some facts in Africa: the fact that interculturality is experienced through linguistic pluralism and the concept of hybridization.

To conclude, when we focus on the questions asked by the participants, the nature of what the speakers said and their remarks made during the colloquium, it is quite evident that the participants of this colloquium have come to realize that it is important to understand the conceptions and practices of interculturalism outside of the Western world. It was noted that the approaches that India has adopted, and through her all of South Asia could have contributed to the deepening of our perspective on pluralism. On the whole, it is clear that this issue of interculturalism and of the acceptance of diversity in different cultures should be better understood in the future as the present and upcoming demographic realities in Quebec will make the meeting of different conceptions of pluralism unavoidable.

André Laliberté

UQAM, Department of Political Science

3. IIM’s International Summer School: *Culture, Identity and Governance: Indigenous Perspective*

(June 28 – July 3, 2007)

This six day program was organized for a group of 13 participants from Italy. Their program was divided in two parts: some sessions were held in Montreal and a cultural immersion in an Iroquois community situated at Fonda, N.Y. USA. The participants were introduced to the history, culture, politico-spiritual system of the Iroquois Longhouse tradition, and to the present-day situation of the Indigenous Nations in North America, as they struggle to preserve and to transmit their identities and traditions. The seminars in Montreal dealt with the following topics:

- The Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse) cosmovision and philosophy, by *Charlie Patten*.
- Culture, spirituality and identity, by *Derryl Thompson*.
- Cultural Identity and governance, by *Charlie Patten*.
- Mohawk educational culture and regeneration of the Nation, by *Kevin Deer* and *Michael Rice*.

During the stay in Fonda, the participants were able to dialogue at length with Sakokwenionkwias (Tom Porter), a very well known leader of the community, on various important issues: the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy, the socio-political nature of matrilineal clans and the struggle for the Nation’s survival.

NEWS FROM IIM'S INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATORS

Intercultura Association

(Bologna Italy)

a) Future Perspectives for the Italian Edition of InterCulture

From 11th to 13th of September 2006, a meeting of the Italian Scientific Committee of the InterCulture journal was held at Salvaro, Bologna. Thirty people attended the meeting that included members of the Scientific Committee, the Publisher Città Aperta and the members of the Italian Association as well as other guests.

Two main themes were discussed during the three days of working session. First, reviewing the first year of activities of the Italian Edition of the journal and of the Italian Association Intercultura, with the help of the important contribution of Kalpana Das, Executive Director of Intercultural Institute of Montreal. Secondly a deep reflection on inter-religious dialogue, was carried out in conversation with Raimon Panikkar, from theory to practice, from history to future perspectives, from philosophical reflections to life experiences. This dialogue highlighted the vivid lightness of the deep intuitions that Raimon Panikkar has developed over the last decades.

This is a brief summary of many stimulating ideas that emerged during the meeting, all the while avoiding specific and «technical» aspects. But the discussion provided

significant information and ideas for the Publisher and for the Scientific Committee to pursue their reflections on more general and wider questions.

i) What can a journal like InterCulture contribute today?

Before answering this question, we should ask what is the function of a journal? Since television and Internet have standardized mass media and communication, journals no longer have a relevant role in the Italian cultural scene with a very few exceptions.

The participants were of the opinion that InterCulture has a place in the cultural scene in Italy, like other journals linked to cultural or religious associations that deal with similar topics (e.g. CEM Mondialità, Interdipendenza, Madrugada, Esodo). Nevertheless, unlike these journals of opinion, the main mission of InterCulture is to deepen contemporary issues and this is a feature that characterizes it and gives it the chance to make contributions without overlapping with others.

The Intercultural Association of Bologna (Italian Association) should ask (take into account) how to increase sales strategies, both on the internet and by creating stronger links with (the) other associations and journals in order to develop synergies, how to participate in the cultural debate and (maybe) collaborate in organizing events such as seminars, congresses on common topics.

ii) What is the «mission» of the journal?

InterCulture exists to give voice to several ideas. Kalpana Das, Executive Director of Intercultural Institute of Montreal (IIM), helped the Italian group to focus on significant topics and issues on which the IIM has been working for 45 years. These topics are the basis of the Canadian Edition of the journal, which actually represents only a small part of the activities of the Institute in Montreal.

In the same spirit of the IIM, the intention of the Italian Edition of InterCulture is to be a «different» voice in intercultural debate, where the specificity of the message is summed up in the following points:

- interculturality is not identified with the issue of immigration which is important, but which represents only one of the several important social aspects;
- considering this, pluralism is seen not to have emerged because of immigration but it is a latent phenomenon of a society.
- Instead of the perspective of the Nation-State on the question of interculturality, we should focus on the relationship between people. This would lead to the avoidance of economic and political interests which are implicit in the perspective of the State. The people-based perspective stimulates a dialogue between worldviews of all cultures, both official and «vernacular», starting with the recognition of the inconsistency of all «cultural universals».

This is why the Italian Edition of the journal intends to give equal value and opportunity both to scientific texts, and traditional knowledge and practices, rich in their original contributions to the discussion on human conditions, that are often neglected if not suppressed.

iii) What is the role of the Italian Association?

Presently the Italian Association Interculture is mostly working on the action aspect of the Italian Edition of the journal. These activities are founded on a common base created by the members of the Association. The study groups and initiatives for international cooperation connected with the Association have for some time expressed the need for a «center» for reflection. It is this need that brought the Association to establish a partnership with the IIM .

Thanks to the commitment and work of several volunteers, a number of seminars have been organized to discuss the issues of the journal. These seminars are open to readers and interested people. The reflections and summaries of these seminars are published in «Quaderni» and are only distributed locally, but these publications can facilitate exchange and interaction with the Canadian Association IIM.

There is a real need to improve the quality of work of the Italian Association, in terms of analysis and theoretical reflection (on the basis of IIM model) and to increase the impact of the journal on the cultural debate in Italy and in Europe. For this reason the role of the Italian Association should be strengthened, beginning by creating relations and a deeper involvement of the different people that constitute the Scientific Committee (Associations, University for the Common Good, University, study groups) and by considering the possibility of creating a real group of intercultural studies.

Conclusions

The Italian Edition of InterCulture should reconsider the question of accessibility of the language used in the journal. It is not simple and not accessible to everybody: This represents great difficulty in facilitating interaction between people of different cultures when they encounter each other. Cultures represent different ways of life, ways of thinking and ways of interpretation of reality, and are not compatible from a purely intellectual point of view.

As Adel Jabbar says, intercultural perspective needs a complicated work of deconstruction, similar to the agricultural work of ploughing, which turns the soil but does not destroy the hard ground of imagery, so that the seed may reproduce.

In conclusion we can quote the words of Raimon Panikkar: «things we cannot speak about are the only things worth trying to say... and if we are convinced we are saying

something new, whatever language we use, it will be understood. This should be our ideal: to say something that is worth saying».

By Matteo Pozzi

b) Reflections on the Culture of Human Rights

At the presentation of the issue of the Italian Edition of the journal («La cultura dei diritti dell'uomo») we were privileged to listen to Agustì Nicolau-Coll, the Assistant director of the Intercultural Institute of Montreal. His presence shows the active collaboration with the Intercultural Institute of Montreal in action-research. The profound experience and competence of Nicolau-Coll have made it possible to question the supposed universality of human rights, both during the presentation at the Feltrinelli Library in Bologna (6th October), and at the seminar held in Casalecchio di Reno (8th October).

The speaker wished to make it clear that his aim was not to reject human rights, but «to emphasize their relative nature and to reveal the dangers inherent in a universalistic view». Besides, the continual contact between people belonging to «other» cultures compels us to listen to their views on human rights. For example, it is interesting to listen to the clever analysis of a Senegalese researcher who said: «In Black Africa, in the name of human rights, they are imposing on us individualism and consumerism that are destroying the solidarity of the community». Nicolau-Coll proposed a path of analysis that follows three phases:

- the historical context for the growth of human rights;
- their cultural context;
- their supposed universality.

From a historical point of view we should remember that human rights were declared

for the first time during the French revolution as an instrument of defense against the monarchy. But later, particularly in the 20th Century, they began to have a structural function in western society. Beginning with political rights in the Declaration of 1789, gradually economic and social and finally cultural rights were incorporated. These «three generations» of human rights bring us up to our own times where we are already speaking about the «fourth generation». These are new rights related to the questions ranging from bioethics to globalization. We may assume that there will be a fifth generation, a sixth generation and so on. The history of human rights, that we consider universal, shows how they have evolved, and will continue evolving. They are not a given reality, but subject to change.

Referring to Panikkar's article contained in the journal, Nicolau-Coll invited the audience to reflect on three fundamental elements that, from a cultural perspective, constitute the basis of *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

- the assumption of the existence of the Universal human nature;
- the belief that dignity is above all the dignity of the individual;
- the conviction that all this is set in a democratic order.

These rights are a consequence of western cultural assumptions that may be justifiably absent in other cultures. For example, he explains how «western culture thinks of the human being above all as an individual. This means that I am different from others because of my individuality, that my autonomy is the most important thing and that I am an end in myself. My rights are aimed at creating me as an individual». But this concept is far from being universal, because other cultures think that it is the community and not the individual that is most important.

To evaluate the universality of human rights we should examine other cultures to find out what are the deep values and myths of different people. Nicolau-Coll believes that to know an «other» culture we have to answer three important questions:

- What is its vision of the universe?
- What are the social features of this universe?
- What are the main ideas that characterize its social life?

There is a specific vision of the universe in each culture. In the western perspective the world is imperfect. The universe needs to be restructured with man's participation in God's creation (Christian perspective) or with the help of progress (non Christian perspective). Hindu culture interprets the universe as a manifestation of the «not-manifested»: the world is perfect and does not need improving. In the Black African vision, the world is born out of chaos, establishing harmony between different elements which are complementary. The cohesion of the universe is based on these irreducible differences and this leads to a process of continuous creation.

These different worldviews have affected social structure. In Black Africa social unity is intended as a result of complementary differences, but this is never the result of externally imposed rules (e.g. a declaration of human rights). In the Hindu context social reality expresses itself in a plurality of forms and hierarchy that reflect a sacred order.

Unity is not uniformity that is achieved through a rule of law, but it derives from diversity itself. Today in the West we find two factors which are the basis for the social order: the person seen as an individual and the social contract between autonomous individuals.

These differences allow us to understand how different the central notions are that

make up a culture. Nicolau-Coll has listed them thus:

- the model of submission (western);
- the model of the interconnection of reality (India);
- the model of differentiation (Black Africa).

In the West there is the model of submission. One submits to a series of rules imposed externally in order to guarantee social order. In the Hindu context the central idea is that of *dharma* («that which ensures cohesion in the whole cosmos»). This does not mean following a moral code imposed from outside, but to discover and live one's own interior *dharma*. One does not ask whether an action is right or not, but if it is *dharma* or not. In the African context it is the tradition passed on by the elders which is central. In the case of conflict the words of the ancestors which arise in the «belly» of the community becomes the point of reference.

Nicolau-Coll's illustration of the specific mythological horizons of each of these cultures has enabled us to take a critical look at the supposed universality of the Declaration of human rights. He concluded his talk with an old wise saying: «When the Tao (tradition, the true way) disappears, morals appear; when morals disappear, ethics appear; when ethics disappear, rights appear; when rights disappear, war appears». This is the question: does the rule of law lead us nearer to war or nearer to spirituality?

By Luigi Arnaboldi

c) InterCulture and the University for the Common Good

On October 22–22, 2006, University of the Common Good organized a seminar at Poggio Bustone, Rieti, Italy. This University is a private initiative, set up by a group of scholars and it operates in various countries in order to study globalization and to find alternatives. At the Faculty of “Mondialita,” presided by Prof. Bruno Amoroso, co-director of the Italian edition of InterCulture, the courses on economics, politics, sciences and education are being offered.

Teachers of Law and Philosophy, representatives from Local Authorities and youth social movements and a good number of students from various faculties attended the event and took part in the discussions.

The subjects were studied from various points of view and the journal InterCulture provided the basic texts for reflection. The following issues of the Canadian edition of the journal were examined: on the question of economics «The Terrorism of Money» (no.149 of the Canadian edition), on the question of science «Worldviews in collision: The Challenge of Genetic Engineering», (no.145 of the Canadian edition) and on education «The Diversity of Educational Culture», (no. 148 of the Canadian edition).

There will be other study sessions held by the University for the Common Good and there was a proposal that the journal InterCulture continue to be a guiding text for these discussion sessions.

By Arrigo Chierigatti

d) Living with Contradiction

Friday the 15th of December 2006 at the *Centro Coscienza* in Milan a seminar was held on the culture of human rights, a subject dealt with in the issue # 5 of the Italian Edition of *InterCulture*. The seminar consisted of an introduction by Arrigo Chierigatti, followed by three discussion groups led by teachers from *Centro Coscienza* and then it was concluded by Chierigatti who spoke on the themes and problems that emerged from discussions. More than sixty people took part in this activity.

Several topics emerged that were not dealt with in the journal. One in particular came up, as a response to this question: «When certain aspects of other cultures cause an absolute refusal on our part, can there be any possibility for interculturality?; For example the mutilation of female genital. “How is it possible not to judge the ‘other’ and not give up our own values?”.

In his answer Chierigatti says he both fully agrees and disagrees. It is necessary, to put aside the «principle of non-contradiction» which is a part of our own tradition and not of others. We should realize that there are certain aspects of our culture which others think are dreadful also. For instance, the commercialization of the female body (for the publicity or to get an audience). We tolerate and accept this. But for others it is not the same, and this also needs to be critically looked at.

Are we in the right, or are they, or are we both right? Patience and an ability to live with contradiction are needed, knowing that every effort for interculturality free from prejudices makes a person grow in dignity and values. But nothing can be imposed. Liberation must grow and mature within one’s own culture and be incorporated within it. It is a revolution from within: a revelation.

By Cesare Fagetti

RESSOURCES AND PUBLICATIONS

We mention here some publications dealing with intercultural mediation for those who wish to deepen the topic of this issue of Interculture.

Etienne LE ROY

Les Africains et l'Institution de la Justice.

Entre mimétismes et métissages

Paris: Dalloz 2004, 284 pp.

Even if this book does not deal directly with intercultural mediation (except for section 3 entitled “The Justice of Minors and the project of cultural intermediation developed by the Laboratoire d’Anthropologie Juridique de Paris au Tribunal pour enfants de Paris” (pp. 236-247), published here as an article in the present issue of InterCulture, it does plead de facto for mediation between the different legal systems of Black Africa, on a pluralistic and metis basis, as explained on the back cover:

“Africa is institutionally sick. Justice, ever stuck within the colonial model, is unable to meet the requirements of a Legal State

which would respond to the aspirations of the great majority of Africans.

Basing itself on thirty years of fieldwork, the book proposes to abandon the mimicry of post-colonial policies in order to refound Justice on a pluralistic and metis basis. The issue is one of adapting the institutional set-up to the new modernity that the Africans are in the process of inventing, between cries and whispers, between violence and hope.

Without giving in to afro-pessimism nor to naïve optimism, the approach intends to contribute to the democratization and pacification of the continent. The book also deals equally with the African diaspora’s relationship to justice in France.

The publication is directed to all those who are seeking XXI century judiciary policies, in Africa, Europe or elsewhere, whether they be practitioners, teachers, seekers, students, volunteers or members of civil society.”

The first part of the book describes the endogenous conceptions of Justice in Africa, while in the second part, it treats the issue of the Institution of Justice and Africans. But in chapter 6 of the second part (pp. 213-249) it studies the relationship of justice with respect to the African diaspora in France, where it speaks “of the concern of the twofold openness which must come both from the African and from the host society and institutions which represent it.”

In his general conclusion that we cannot reproduce here, Etienne Le Roy proposes both for Africa and for the diaspora, a radical judicial pluralism for a refounding of the way of solving conflicts (pp. 262-291).

Carole YOUNES et Etienne LE ROY
Médiation et diversité culturelle.
Pour quelle société?

Éditions Karthala (Paris), 2002, 311pp.

The different articles of the book articulate around three principal axes:

- The first situates mediation in its relationship to Law and Justice, bringing out what constitutes the originality of the mediation approach. It allows us to explore different conceptions of law and to deepen our understanding of the relationship between law and society;
- The second axis consists in a work of reflexion on the practices of intercultural mediation and on the legal and societal problems linked to contexts of interculturality;
- After setting mediation in its relationship to law and the analysis of the practices of intercultural mediation, the third theme offers the opportunity to examine the question that is at the heart of our reflexion, namely the issue of the social link.

The focus on cultural difference is too often associated with improving the standing of idiosyncracies, with culturalistic confinement, even “ghettoisation”. Similarly, mediation, if not perceived as a passing fashion to... circumvent different conflicts, is sometimes conceived as a spineless justice incapable of stopping the breakdown of our societies but even contributing to it, or it is conceived as the new utopia of a society liberated from its conflicts.

Finally when we try to discover the cross-roads of taking up our cultural differences and the practices of mediation, one hits a

kind of «black hole» with regard to such essential questions as those of the place one should reserve to pluralism, to multiculturalism and to the complexity of our contemporary societies.

The book proposes a reading which liberates cultural difference from the representations that are generally associated with it, namely in terms of the hardening and essentialization of identities, in order to embrace their dynamics and to perceive their potentialities. Mediation constitutes here a framework allowing one to approach differently the forming of our living together, and thus opening the field of law to new practices and experiences, thus contributing to our understanding of law.

By deepening particularly some ongoing approaches, this work offers, rather than a doctrine, some tracks to deepen our understanding of the issues behind the social practices birthing right in front of us. It gives us “food for thought” in order to conceive our society’s future.

Mediation promotes a non antagonistic vision of integration, encourages processes that avoid the idea of a brutal rupture, and which are rather of the order of interbreeding. Behind the word «mediation» hide many practices, professional or not, and also divergent visions of society, between multiculturalism on the one hand and the universalism of the «French model of integration» on the other. But these two visions which seem to be in opposition can certainly coexist, as long as they are not erected as immutable, intangible, dogma, in a word: “sacred”.

Jordi Agusti-Panareda
*An attempt to mediate immigrant
integration. Intercultural mediators in
Catalonia*

Doctoral These presented at the Stanford
Law School of Stanford University

Catalonia, a historical region and an autonomous community located in the northeast of Spain, with its own language and cultural identity, is an especially interesting setting in which to study intercultural mediation, not only because of the writer's knowledge of the region but also because of its immigration context and the nature of its cultural brokering experiences. Catalonia is a relatively new destination for international migrations and has recently experienced an enormous increase in migration flows. Since public and private actors are currently working on the development of immigrant integration programs – and since the first stage of integration processes is one of the most important moments in the reception of the newly arrived – Catalonia turns out to be an especially interesting research location. An important part of these attempts to manage immigration, intercultural mediation services in Catalonia constitute a pioneer experience whose specificity deserves research interest.

The dissertation is divided into four main parts. In the first one the author frames the research (chapter 1), presents its methodological underpinnings (chapter 2), describes the context against which the intercultural mediation services emerged and introduces the main conceptual tools that are later used in order to analyze their work (chapter 3). In the second part he provides an overview of intercultural mediators and their activities. He analyzes their emergence, profile, roles, functions and areas of intervention and examines their main users (chapter 4). Afterwards, he explores the existence of alternative figures in Catalonia and of similar institutions both in Spain and internationally (chapter

5). The aim is to draw a brief comparative framework from which to identify common threads and note the specificities of intercultural mediation.

In the third part of the dissertation the author focuses on three fundamental dimensions or interpretative stances from which to analyze the contributions of intercultural mediators. First, he looks at their interventions managing conflict, stressing the importance of their preventive activities and community actions (chapter 6). Secondly, he explores the role of culture in their work and the way they contribute to the management of cultural differences and the parties' internal tensions and conflicts, which are often related to their sense of cultural belonging and identity (chapter 7). Thirdly, he analyzes the interventions of mediators as brokers in the legal, institutional and, more broadly, normative fields, exploring their activities transmitting norms and the impact of their work on normative and institutional arrangements and structures (chapter 8).

The fourth part of the dissertation moves from a descriptive to a predominantly interpretative and evaluative stance. It first explores the perceptions in the field regarding the work of intercultural mediators, analyzing the opinions and understandings held by mediation users and the critical voices against them (chapter 9). Secondly, it critically assesses the work of mediators by looking at two central and apparently puzzling questions: whether their work can really be considered mediation or intercultural (chapter 10). An analysis of these questions provides a way to evaluate and better understand the roles of mediators, unveiling their underlying tensions and contradictions. Thirdly, he examines both present and future perspectives of intercultural mediation programs and sketches a set of suggestions for their development on the basis of the lessons drawn from the work of intercultural mediators (chapter 11). In

the conclusion (chapter 12) he summarizes the different findings of the research and stresses the contributions and significance of the intercultural mediators' attempt to manage immigrant integration through mediation. Even if it cannot be properly considered completely mediatory or fully intercultural, an examination of this enterprise sheds valuable light on the complex plasticity of intercultural mediators and their rich potential for bridging cultural gaps, managing cross-cultural conflict and fostering integration as they walk down a rough and contradictory path that has yet to be fully defined. (Excerpt from Introduction of the thesis)

Margalit Cohen-Émerique et

Abdelhafid Hammouche (coord.)

«Médiations et travail social» *Hommes & migrations*, no. 1249, mai 2004.

GIP de la Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration (Paris)

Mediation promotes a non-antagonistic vision of integration, it encourages processes which do away with all ideas of brutal rupture, and which are rather of the order of interbreeding. Behind the word «mediation» are hidden multiple practices, professional or not, and also divergent views of society, between multiculturalism on the one hand and the universalism of the «French model of integration» on the other. Now these two visions which seem to oppose each other can perfectly coexist, as long as they are not erected into an immutable, intangible, «sacred» dogma.

Robert VACHON

«Mediator and intercultural mediation
InterCulture, no.129, autumn 1995.

Intercultural Institute of Montreal

In this issue of *InterCulture*, which is a part of a series of three publications and entitled “Guswenta and the Intercultural Imperative”, is a research paper on the Intercultural foundations of Peace between the Mohawks and the North American States. The author Robert Vachon treats the question of intercultural mediation specifically in relation to the issue of dialogue between native and non-native nations in North America. Concretely, in the section entitled “mediation and intercultural mediation”, a distinction is made, first between the intermediary and the mediator, the latter being a person, not as an outsider but as a participant in the cultural worlds that he mediates. Then, the author speaks of language being first mediator and states the importance of “reconnecting with the embedded word such as, commitment, love, gift of self, personal conviction, which narrates the myth rather than remaining a prisoner of that which reduces life to definitions.”(p.25)The author also underscores the importance of personal testimony that alone allows a dialogue to be true and can only take place in a mythical communion. Finally, some characteristics of a true intercultural mediation are enumerated in the following words: “intercultural mediation cannot be reduced to a technique, a science, an ideology, a model, a system. Nor can it be reduced to negotiation and rational organization. It is wisdom and an art. We can possibly call it the art and wisdom of interculturalization or mutual fecundation of cultures.”(p.33)

