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## THE UNDENIABLE *OTHER*

### Nepaneigiamas *kitas*

#### SUMMARY

The efforts to explain the other constantly fail. The creation of images reveals the presence of the other who appears both as an excess of any explanation and as a condition for the understanding of the diversity of such images. Even in its denial, such presence demands a dialogical dimension which includes both the explainer and the other. The birth of Western civilization, in its Socratic mode, was profoundly dialogical. Various trends, such as scientism and theology, shifted discourse to monological doctrines. Regardless of the kind of monologue, each claimed to subsume the other in its own logic, depriving the other of equal voice. Yet what is significant is that such a voice was always present – even in its denial. Good examples come from cultural conquests, racisms and colonialisms. Yet the most pronounced monological logic is scientific reductionism to a single ontological base: the fragmenting logic of materialism.

#### SANTRAUKA

Visos pastangos paaiškinti kitą nuolat nueina perniek. Bet koks bandymas sukurti išbaigtą kito įvaizdį atskleidžia tik tai, kad tas kitas pasirodo esąs daugiau, nei bet koks įvaizdis ar paaiškinimas gali aprėpti. Tokios aplinkybės, net ir kito neigimo atveju, reikalauja dialogiško santykio, apimančio tiek aiškintoją, tiek ir kitą. Sokratiškoji Vakarų civilizacijos pradžia buvo giliai dialogiška, tačiau tokios tendencijos, pavydžiui, kaip mokslai ar teologija, pasuko šią kultūrą monologiškų doktrinų link. Nepriklausomai nuo monologiškumo rūšies, kiekviena doktrina tvirtina apimanti kitą savąja logika, savo ruožtu atimdama iš to kito lygiavertį balsą. Vis dėlto tokie kultūrų užkariavimo pavyzdžiai kaip rasizmas ar kolonializmas atskleidžia, kad kito balsas niekur nedingsta, net jei jis ir paneigiamas. Tačiau pačią ryškiausią monologišką logiką atskleidžia mokslinis redukcionizmas, kuris viską suprastina į vieną ontologinį pagrindą – fragmentuojančią materializmo logiką.

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RAKTAŽODŽIAI: kitas, monologinė tradicija, dialoginė tradicija, Senovės Graikija, krikščionybė, tapatumas.

KEYWORDS: the other, monological tradition, dialogical tradition, Ancient Greece, Christianity, identity.

## MONOLOGUE

Monologue extends across civilizations, theories, ideologies, conquests and literatures. A brief comparative overview is one way to become acquainted with its complexities. It is remarkable that monological pronouncements can emerge in the most unsuspected ways. One may be moved by some rhetorical image and join a movement proclaiming to be the salvation of the world: fascism, communism, the invisible hand of the market, pride in belonging to the most advanced civilization and many others. Internally dialogical cultures may be monological in relation to others. We can offer an example of the latter case. There is a relocation of a tradition by violence: one culture conquers another and incorporates it completely, specifically if the conquering culture has a monopoly of text production. The Greeks, although dialogical within their own context, possessing a strong literary tradition, had to locate the other in such a context, and deny the other's voice. This is what happened to Mediterranean culture after the Doric invasion. Worldviews, values and truths here belong to the sphere of myths. What we know about old cultures comes from archeology, such as the palaces of Crete, or the ruins of Troy. But the contents of their way of life are given us in Greek mythology. We have to guess, surmise, infer by indirection to get some diffused notion about the *chthonic* goddesses and gods. It is of note that the very term *chthonic* is already a demeaning word: goddesses and gods of the dead, of the world of shadows, of the underworld. It is a world that one can imagine, dream about, but cannot access. The maternal,

as the underworld, is regarded here as conquered. It lives in shapes of monsters such as a Minotaur. The Greek myths, with respect to the Trojan, are monological insofar as they speak for and incorporate the other in their own context. This life, nonetheless, exercises a power that the conquering tradition cannot help but borrow in order to preserve its own vitality. This borrowing appears in numerous revitalizing rituals, wherein the conquering tradition must increase and invest energies into maintaining the vigilance against those powerful foes, the demons to be suppressed, expiated, and yet demons that inhabit every image and dominate the recesses of the psyche. Here, the other is included, but without its genuine voice. The latter sounded Greek without total negation of its human voice.

A more complex case appears where the other's tradition is negated monologically and yet recognized in a unique way. In the Western world, the case is offered by Christianity with the breakdown and conquest of Rome by Middle Eastern cultures, and then the rejection in Rome of its own literary tradition. This means that by rejecting the Hellenic tradition, Christianity rejects and suppresses paganism, and more precisely the literary traditions of Hellenism which were more than pagan. That this literary tradition was subsumed under the title paganism shows the virulence of this suppression. We surmise that large amounts of texts, of which we know only the titles, are lost forever. In the context of monological Christianity, such texts were evil and false and had to be destroyed.

The suppression was well-defined by the apologists, the early church fathers and the early councils before Christianity became a secular power. The acts of destruction followed, most significant among which was the burning of the library of Alexandria. This is to say, in order to root out Hellenism, it was not enough to destroy the temples; literary tradition had to be destroyed. Therefore, the burning of libraries, books, and the producers of books became an enduring tradition. The end of this destruction is marked by the forced expulsion of philosophers and Hellenistic scholars from Athens and other capitals by Justinian. They went to Persia, and via this exodus, the cultural heritage of Hellas could have its renaissance in medieval scholasticism, and later in European Renaissance. Plato was back on the scene. The suppression of other literary traditions – at times called heretical – is a characteristic Christian attitude toward other literary traditions. This attitude, having become a tradition, could be adopted and extended by cultural influences. Thus, in the 20th c., the Russian Revolution engaged in the destruction of texts, as well as their authors. The Nazis did the same, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution repeated this Christian tradition. In this sense, the 20th c. saw some of the most archaic methods to deal with literary traditions of others which were regarded as condemnable in the context of a specific monologue.

Let us return to the other modification, i.e. a confrontation of two traditions that are literary, yet incapable of complete destruction. This is the case at another level, when Christians attempted to destroy the Greco-Roman tradition com-

pletely, and then had to internalize some of the latter. How does this monological tradition incorporate texts of the conquered, or what is rejected in texts, for further use? This is possible due to the fact that in a given monological tradition, there is a division into rivals among texts. Having become Middle Eastern, Rome's Church fathers rejected the Hellenistic tradition, although they were educated in it. By winning, they had to use the techniques of the conquered, and the technique was the art of grammar, to be applied to the Scriptures. The second move was determined by the principle of *haire-sis*. But to identify a heresy, one needed logic to show the difference between truth and fallacy. The technology for this was offered by classical philosophy – such as modified Aristotelian categories. The result: a rigid system of dogmas. In this context, most of the philosophical heritage, that found its way into Christian heritage, appears in disguise. What happens to this heritage is well exemplified in Slavic literature; there were no sources available to make comparisons, and hence all traces of Hellenistic tradition were regarded as authentic ideas of church fathers. Yet, these very ideas had the power to initiate the Renaissance.

Here, a new system was developed that became a tradition. A set of texts in writing was developed by highly educated people. These texts were also designed to eliminate heresies and thus determine rigid standards for all aspects of life. Compared to Hellas, this was monological, since its center had one eminent text, purportedly reporting an eminent event: The New Testament. The eminent text was constantly appealed to as the final arbiter of all other claims.

This means that the text became dominant and exclusive. Yet, as just pointed out, it already incorporated the logic of philosophers both as rigorous means of

thinking and as heresy. And this arrangement lent power to the incorporated tradition, belonging to the other, leading the monological tradition into a crisis.

## INDIA

Churchill was dismayed that “a naked *fakir* has pushed the British Empire out of India.” India provided an example of how a colonial power attempted to incorporate another civilization into its monological civilization. To understand such efforts, it is advisable to sketch out some of the features and complexities of Indian tradition and its resilience to colonial power. That traditional India is dialogical, is testified by the great variety of co-existing cultures, even within eminent texts such as *Ramayana and Mahabharata*. The so-called religious traditions of India pay scant attention to monological doctrines and beliefs; their emphasis is on *orthopraxy* – correct practice. The focus is on performance, what a person does rather than what he believes to be some scriptural doctrine. It can be said that even divinities are assistants in practice and thus subordinate to the actions of humans. In this sense, doctrines are not some primary texts to be followed, but are added as secondary level interpretations of the meaning of actions. The use of terms such as *dharma*, in any religious sense, showed up only in the last few centuries. Indeed, the notion of Hinduism as a religion was generated by English literature in India during the colonial period, abstracting it from its multiple contexts of activity. It is well known that in India one can believe in contradictory theses without losing the primacy of ac-

tivity, and the latter is done for its own sake. After all, believing in some doctrine does not mean anything, since one’s *karma*, action will become one’s true character. The emphasis on action opens up the ability to play and interact with all sorts of images, divinities, theories, symbolic designs – including the most profound *dharma – law* without being swept up in any of them as a monologue to follow. Hence, no statement or narrative is entirely right or wrong, and incompatible explanations can coexist in the richness of multiple actions-interactions. This means that a particular position is meaningless, since its sense arises both from action and interaction with other positions. This can be extended to make certain that even a position cannot be followed, because in its interaction with others, it will change and cannot be repeated. This must be emphasized: Indian individuality is not some separate atom, but precisely this unique intersection and recreation of a variety of trends.

The *Ramayana* epic is performed as religious recitation, as formal discourse, community story-telling by professionals, as varying forms of dance, dramatic arts, shadow play, puppet play, festivals (Ramanujan). The spoken or performed text has its life in its enactment, and not as a book. In this sense the “text” is equivalent to an aesthetic cosmos, articulated in numerous ways and media.

Printing in India is only around 150 years old; and much of oral tradition is preserved through mnemonic devices devised from the Vedic period. The *Ramayana* did exist as copy, as manuscripts which were copied from region to region, but the written text itself not only included interpolations now described as inauthentic, but also continually overtaken by new spoken variations. Stories linked to the *Ramayana* proliferate, repeat, and many oral versions counter others; each performance is in literal terms, a new telling, since it cannot exactly reproduce an earlier one. Thus, the text is transformed every time in performance and it is available only in its transformation. As a continually performed text, it is not an epic world distanced from current life; its power in contemporary politics is very evident in the way the *Ramayana* has been used by the neo-Hindu nationalists.

In the epic text *Mahabharata*, the playful divinity Krishna is an example of an orthopraxy who weaves *dharma* (law) against *adharma* (anti-law) during a war between the bad Kauravas and the good Pandavas, to bring about the victory of the Pandavas, the adherents to *dharma*, but also its violators. Indeed, Krishna is a weaving paradox whose activities do not aim at achieving an absolute victory of doctrinal *dharma*, only its imbalance with and against *adharma* – a precarious play on the brink of unsuspected novelties. The same can be said of the multiple faiths, sects, traditions that play with each other, intersect and transform one another, comprising a tapestry whose treads do not form geometric patterns – not unlike the cosmic sculptures of Khajuraho, replete with erotic interactions of

the most diverse creatures, including humans. Different strands are so fused that it is unclear which one borrowed what from others, and when. Some local story or legend may become renown in a region, then become incorporated into Indian tradition by associating it with some major deity of that tradition, and disseminated throughout the subcontinent, endearingly referred to as Mother India. At the same time, the rituals associated with the main deity become attributed to a local divinity. With this understanding, it is worth mentioning that neither linear continuum nor circular “eternal return of the same” is valid – although any one may become an aspect that is interwoven as a partial metaphor in the tradition. Strictly speaking, India does not have a directional history, but many stories, which in their telling, will become attached to some event and given significance across centuries, only to be forgotten. One could call this multiplicity a creative encounter that is at the base of Indian tolerance, use of ambiguities and contradictions in a most fascinating ways. It is capable of capturing and reinterpreting the old in an effort to come to terms with the new, and to reinterpret it without rejecting the other. We know that in more recent times the other was colonialism, and we know the many ways that Indian tradition has woven foreign features into its own fabric, leading to self-interpretation that currently is an intricate part of that tradition, and yet as only one part, which has played a major role in creating a tension within Mother India. The division into two separate nationalities is one indication of this tension that haunts the border of two religions: Hinduism and Islam, both assuming

strict fundamentalist doctrines, are copies of colonial monological thinking.

There might be a variety of themes related to British colonial domination of India, leading to the conclusion that there is no monological subjection and incorporation of Indian tradition into some presumed British monologue. This might be true of one level of interpretation, but at a more basic level, two domains predominate. First is the way that the British media, administration and even famous intellectuals have depicted the life of Indians and their culture. The depiction shares a common tactic with all monological attitudes: degradation. British colonial masters and political thinkers, such as Thomas Macaulay, John Stewart Mill, Charles Trevelyan and others agreed on the need to shape the Indian, not only to understand British laws, but also to be grateful for them. The greatest difficulty in accomplishing such a task was the immorality and ignorance of the people. They lacked spiritual understanding on which British government was based. Thus, the natives had to be kept down by power, or willingly submit by realizing that the British were wiser, more just, humane and committed to helping the Indian to accept a superior civilization. In all other respects, Indian arts and literature did not have appropriate styles required to cultivate moral and intellectual capacities essential for civilized people. Only English literature, imbued with morality, proper emotions, transformation of thinking, and objective knowledge had to be introduced in education, leading to the recognition of the legitimate domination by the British.

The depictions of Indian lack of culture and its moral restraints was focused

on the presumed sexual depravity. Bureaucrats, journalists and missionaries wrote authoritative articles and sensational reports which complained about Indian culture as irrational, deceitful and sexually perverse. This evaluation was well exemplified by the publication of a book of poems, titled *Radhika Santwanam* (*Appeasing Radhika*). The poet, an 18<sup>th</sup> c. Telugu woman, Muddupalani, was one of the most highly regarded classical writers. Thus in 1910, Bangalore Nagaratnamma, an accomplished writer and artist herself, edited and published Muddupalani's book. The book is the best example of classical Telugu style, containing a balance among all the *rasas* which include: eros, anger, joy, jealousy, etc. The editor, Nagaratnamma, was accused of publishing a lewd book composed by a prostitute, and therefore a danger to the moral health of British colonial subjects. In 1911, police commissioner Cunningham seized all the copies and charged the publishing house with producing an obscene book. It is now possible to extricate the first dimension of British monologue: by rejecting the culture of India as immoral, lewd and obscene, the colonials rejected the humanity of Indians. After all, if culture is an expression of human spirituality and creativity, then its rejection and reduction to the lowest biological function – sex – is a rejection of Indian humanity.

The second monological dimension is a classic case of locating the other in the hermeneutical context of the ruling power. The cultural practices, the great sculptural monuments and their cosmic meaning were reduced to the proper place in the reality of the British world, depicted as normal by Mill previously

mentioned. The utilitarian human nature, befitting upper British class formed a framework in which India was found to be a place that was grotesque, strange, irrational and incapable of surviving on its own as a human civilization. This framework was extended by the evangelical missionaries who insisted that not only British morality, but Christian laws would have to be added to save India from all those multiple divinities, including: the Dark Kali, and their dancing worshipers, the *Devadasi* – who performed sacred dances, capturing the cosmic sway of *Kama, Shakti and Lila* in temples, and were referred to as gyrating prostitutes attracting customers. The expressivity of their dances was reduced to the British conception of human psychology, their bodily movements, which always told a cosmic story, became immoral, perverse and low – in other words, crude sex. In short, the dancing bodies, forming and deforming cosmic energies, became something with immoral and degrading psychological emotions. These beautiful immense sculptures, which portrayed the cosmic-kamic union, were thoroughly misinterpreted and taken out of Indian context by being called pornographic; the carved imagery was designed to articulate the kamic-erotic connection of all events, things, mythical figures without social gradations. It was, so to speak, an entire universe connected by erotic passion. Yet, this blissful cosmic nexus was degraded as the art of the racial others, and therefore was placed in the unspeakable and uncivilized region of immorality, sexual promiscuity and bestiality; hence not deserving the title of art.

The sculptures at Khajuraho were also evaluated in the same way: extremely indecent, obscene and offensive, especially since they were in the temples that professed to be erected for religious purposes. Naked images of women were seen in many locations. The British regarded these aesthetic images as indecent and obscene, and thus were judged morally and not aesthetically. Once again, the significant aspect of this art, its cosmic nexus, the cosmic union, cosmic aesthetics were excluded and thus inserted into an entirely different context. As mentioned earlier, monologue does not exclude the other, but can place the other in a most degrading manner and reduce it to a sub-human pre-civilized level. The only worthy Indian was the one who served the British interests loyally– depicted in films such as *Gunga Din*, where he saves the British army from the uncivilized hordes wanting to destroy the bringers of truth and morality. In addition, the dark skinned who worship Kali, are designated metaphysically under the sign of nothingness, of exclusion and position of a tradition that belongs elsewhere – a fact of a single, essential and undifferentiated blackness. The latter is also powerless since it is under a sign of non-being, and therefore is nothing. This is precisely the place where the monological non-position proclaims itself not only as superior, but above all, as the sole bearer of Being itself. This is the ultimate metaphysics of Being and Nothing, manifest in a monological non-position. Since the principles of such a non-position are also manifest in other colonial incursions, including China, their repetition in the latter would be redundant for this study.

## FAILURES OF IDENTITY

These simple examples disclose the inevitable presence of the other and its essential role in any univocal non-position. All the increasing efforts to explain the other reveals that the created images are never adequate to keep the other in its place – the other is always excessive, requiring more images to cover over the excesses. After all, the latter continuously reveal the inadequacies of the images, and the suppressed other keeps intruding with his presence as equivalent to the oppressor, the victorious one, and to such an extent that the other is posited as an equivalent force turning up everywhere. Thus, with respect to racism, when jazz appeared with its distinct style, it was labelled as the end of all civilization and thus would not be allowed. In other words, small groups playing jazz during funeral processions became an enormous image, capable of abolishing all that is civilized. Greater forces and vigilance had to be marshalled lest all would be lost. The contemporary world is replete with univocal non-positions, each tensed against the other, and each attempting to subsume the other as lower, requiring no discussion with the other who is false and evil.

Such a dual abstraction, indeed disembodied reification, is extended to include various moves toward liberation from racism, ethnocentrism and their modes of oppression. In this case, those to be liberated must be passively ideal, voiceless. They cannot have any faults; any faults are the results of oppression. In this sense, the oppressors are completely faulty, corrupting and immoral.

Unless one grants the oppressor a status of pure reification, one will have to lend him a position of subjectivity, intentionality and responsibility for his morally unjustifiable racist activities. The ideal oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, will have to surrender the status of a subject, the being of intentionality, of making decisions. In order to retain their purity and innocence, they will have to parade their passivity, their life aseath as the ultimate virtue. It is an ideality that is equally without position, although it may proclaim that it is the highest bearer of moral virtues. This abolition of their own situated dialogical transcendence abolishes their own humanity.

Given a civilization that maintains its own artistic stability and classic superiority, the appearance of an alien style, as the case with India, was judged in many negative ways: demonized, denigrated, assaulted and even classicized (belonging to the lowest classes). Once again, the case is jazz. It was regarded as demonic, total destruction of civilization, frameless, an intrusion from the dark and chaotic recesses of the black soul. We shall call this intersection by the art of the racial other as permanence disruption. This is to say, the African and African American arts did not follow proper structural frames, stylistic stabilities and parameters, and hence it was a threat to real classical art. The music had no central key, the dances were wild, the masks were distortions of true human form. Indeed, the arts of the other race and the race itself were regarded as parts of the natural landscape,

while we were the humans who created something above nature. We can argue that this denigration of the other race is an effort to maintain the permanence of one's own invented superior position. But to maintain this position, one engages in "hermeneutics of suppression." The latter does not claim to exclude the arts of the other, but by usurping the privilege of aesthetic criticism recontextualizes, renames, repositions and finally abolishes the sense of art of a given tradition. In most cases, the artworks are not subjected to physical destruction; rather, they are rearticulated

in ways that make them into monsters, demonic images, expressions of immorality and indeed, lesser beings. It could be argued that this fate might be worse than complete destruction, since in the latter, there are no images to show. But in the hermeneutics of suppression, the images, stories, texts and dances are paraded in their reinterpreted fashion, and thus identified as the arts of the other that have only a negative designation: they are to be paraded in this reinterpreted manner as disruptions of permanent human values, creative geniuses and high aesthetic standards.

## INCARNATION OF THE OTHER

The first feature of the presence of the other is obvious in negation and degradation, and thus of direct recognition of monologue as a position. Hence being completely dependent on the other. While the dependence might be negative – we are not like them, our art is not like theirs, our god is the only one, and thus we must guard against the temptations exhibited in their exotic dances, alluring poses, and reminders that we must constantly deny ourselves what is part of our lives. Obviously, there is an opportunity to gain liberation from our own narrowness, and expand our polycentric awareness; after all, we already did so by recognizing the other in a demeaning, and yet unavoidable presence. Without the other, the monological claims would have no credence, and would sink into the night where all cows are black. The very maintenance of such credence leads us to the second, and more profound in-

carnation of humanity, and thus a polylogical presence of the other.

The recognition of the other as lesser than a civilized or cultured being seems to suggest that such degradation confirms the true height and supremacy of the racist, the colonizer, the follower of the true god, the scientist or the ideologue – all members of a monologue. Indeed, the very self-importance and pride in belonging to a superior race, ethnicity, religion or group seems to suggest the need to exclude the other, by degradation from only us as the true representatives of humanity, civilization and culture. Yet, an explication of the essential features of such pride reveals an unexpected turn of awareness. We cannot degrade a creature by designating it for what it is; in other words, to call a dog a dog is not degradation. Only a coupling of a human with a dog becomes degradation and a recognition

that such a coupling does not in any way degrade the dog, but only the other. Degrading and despising is possible only in light of recognition of the other. During the Chinese Boxer Rebellion against the poisoning of the Chinese by the civilized Western nations, the invading Western armies and traders formed areas only for themselves, posting signs – “Chinese and dogs not allowed.” Such signs reveal the absolute recognition of the other as equal, i.e. degradation of others by self-elevation reveals the other’s elevation, and our anxiety in the face of the other’s total presence. Only in the presence of the other as equal, the racist, ideologue or scientist recognizes his own humanity. After all, if the other is really a dog, then there is no need to demand that it recognize the racists’ superiority, and indeed, the racist would not be able to claim superiority over the other. The dog would care the least to be the other

required to elevate the racist to a superior position worthy of recognition. This logic leads all the way to condemning the other to death: unable to withstand the presence of the other, we condemn him to death and thus reveal that we have denied our own humanity, have degraded ourselves, and thus hate the other not only for exhibiting his humanity, but also for revealing our own self-degradation. This is well depicted by Victor Frankl’s writings about his experience in a concentration camp. If a prisoner would show any self-respect, treat others with respect, he would be either beaten or immediately exterminated, as he was a reminder to the camp guards and valuable functionaries of a racist empire, that they had lost their human-self, specifically visible in their obscene pretense to be superior. Such a pretense reveals the dialogical and polycentric presence of the other.

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