

PROGRAMME

« L'autre » dans les traditions d'Asie du Sud: autres divins, autres religieux, autres culturels / The "Other" in South Asian Traditions: Divine Others, Religious Others, Cultural Others

6 décembre 2019, 9h00-17h00 / December 6th 2019, 9.00am-5pm

Pavillon Marguerite d'Youville, salle/ room 3113 (3^e étage, 3rd floor)

**Université de Montréal, 2375 chemin de la Côte Ste Catherine, Montréal H3C 3J7
Métro : Station Édouard-Montpetit (ligne bleue/ blue line)**

Ce colloque est organisé en lien avec le projet de recherche « **The Radhasoami Tradition in Canada and the United States** », chercheure principale : **Diana Dimitrova**, professeure titulaire, Institut d'études religieuses, Université de Montréal

Nous remercions le Conseil de Recherche en Sciences Humaines du Canada, l'Institut d'études religieuses (IER) et le Centre d'études asiatiques (CÉTASE) de la Faculté des arts et des sciences de l'Université de Montréal, le Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche sur les religions et les spiritualités de l'Université de Montréal (CIRRES), le Centre d'études et de recherches internationales de l'Université de Montréal (CÉRIUM) et le Conseil de recherche sur la religion (CREOR) de leur soutien.

Ce colloque est dédié aux 14 femmes, « altérisées » et assassinées à l'École Polytechnique le 6 décembre 1989, en raison de leur choix professionnel.

This symposium has been organized in connection with the research project "**The Radhasoami Tradition in Canada and the United States**", principal investigator; **Diana Dimitrova**, Professor at the Institute of Religious Studies, University of Montreal

We acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, of the Institute of Religious Studies (IÉR), of the Centre for Asian Studies (CÉTASE) in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of the University of Montreal, the Interdisciplinary Centre for research on religions and spiritualities of the University of Montréal (CIRRES), the Centre for International Studies and Research (CÉRIUM), and of the Council for Research on Religion (CREOR).

This symposium is dedicated to the 14 women, othered and murdered at the École Polytechnique on December 6, 1989, because of their professional choice

PROGRAMME

9h00-9h30 Accueil/Arrival (Pavillon Marguerite d'Youville, salle/room 3113)

9h30-9h45 Mot de bienvenue/ Welcome address

Prof. Alain Gignac, Directeur, Institut d'études religieuses/
Director, Institute of Religious Studies

Prof. Laurence Monnais, Directrice, Centre d'études asiatiques/
Director, Center for Asian Studies

9h45-11h45 Session 1 : Autres divins et religieux/ Divine and Religious Others

Présidence/ Presider, **Prof. Andrea Pinkney**, Université McGill

The Other in Western and South Asian Thought
Prof. Diana Dimitrova, Université de Montréal

So Close Yet So Far: Devotion, Humility, and Non-duality in Śaiva
Hymns from Kashmir
Prof. Hamsa Stainton, Université McGill

Transcending otherness: Bridging the gap between the divine and
human in the words of gods
Prof. Leslie Orr, Université Concordia

Interaction with Others: People, Gods, Ghosts, and Demons in the
Central Himalayas
Prof. John Leavitt, Université de Montréal

12h00-13h30 Pause-lunch/ Lunch Break

13h30-15h30 Session 2 : Autres religieux et culturels/ Religious and Cultural Others

Présidence/Presider, **Prof. John Leavitt**, Université de Montréal

Othered-Mothers: Pregnancy and Virtue in Early Buddhist Narrative
Prof. Vanessa Sasson, Collège Marianopolis

The Brahman : Xenology in Amīr Khusrow's *Alexandrine Mirror*
Prof. Prashant Keshavmurthy, Université McGill

Eating Together? : Writing Caste into Food History
Prof. Rachel Berger, Université Concordia

La reconnaissance juridique du 3ième genre en Inde
Prof. Karine Bates, Université de Montréal

15h30-15h45 Pause-café

15h45-16h45 Session 3 : Présentations d'étudiants/ Student presentations

Présidence/ Presider, **Prof. Karine Bates**, Université de Montréal

Kabir comme instaurateur d'une affinité élective entre les antagonismes religieux
Sonia Benchaib, Université de Montréal

Guru Nanak: Otherness in the Construction of the Bhakti Movement
Félix-Eduardo Salcedo, Université de Montréal

Comment allier altérité et unité; unicité, liberté et universalité, d'après le maître Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov (1900-1986)
Pascale Frémond, Université de Montréal

Le genre et la sexualité dans la construction identitaire du *hindutva*
Justine Laporta, Université de Montréal

RÉSUMÉ/ ABSTRACTS

Panel 1

The Other in Western and South Asian Thought Prof. Diana Dimitrova, Université de Montréal

The concepts of the “other” and “otherness” have not been central to Western metaphysical thought until the nineteenth-century. In the age of modernity, the concept of the “other” and “otherness” have been studied by several influential thinkers, such as phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, phenomenologist and existentialist Martin Heidegger, phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and existentialist Emanuel Lévinas. The notion of the “other” has also been the subject of study by many poststructuralist, postmodernist and feminist thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva. In the following, I will focus on two major interpretations of the concept of the “other,” namely the phenomenological and post-phenomenological

positions, as represented in the works of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, and of Lévinas respectively. I shall then examine the positions of two important postmodernist thinkers, Derrida and Foucault, and will conclude by suggesting possible phenomenological and post-phenomenological interpretations of the concept of the “other” in Hindu and Buddhist thought.

So Close Yet So Far: Devotion, Humility, and Non-duality in Śaiva Hymns from Kashmir Prof. Hamsa Stainton, Université McGill

This paper analyzes a creative tension found in certain premodern hymns of praise from Kashmir. On one hand, these hymns rehearse the low state of the speaker and the greatness of Śiva as the supreme deity. Their expressions of humility and devotion, in other words, stress the otherness of God. On the other hand, they also rely on a non-dualistic understanding of the deity as no different from one’s own self. This paper explores this tension between closeness and distance, focusing on how the poetic features of the hymn as a genre facilitate the compelling configuration of devotion, humility, and theological sophistication in these texts. Finally, stepping back from this particular region, the paper reflects on South Asian traditions of Hindu prayer and devotion (*bhakti*) more broadly.

Transcending otherness: Bridging the gap between the divine and human in the words of gods Prof. Leslie Orr, Université Concordia

Among the inscriptions engraved on the walls of temples in southernmost Tamilnadu are divine commands. These inscriptions, dating from the 13th to 16th centuries, describe the deity of the temple issuing his order while seated in state on a special “throne” within the temple, echoing the inscriptional idiom used in this region by the Pandya rulers when they issued royal orders from their palaces in Madurai and elsewhere. The divine commands are given in the first person plural, and are filled with references to “our temple,” “our servants” – and often designate “our son” as the agent tasked with fulfilling the desires of the deity. Frequently “our son” turns out to be a Pandya king, but a particular temple deity might have many sons, and a particular ruler might have more than one divine “father.”

This paper explores the language of inclusiveness in the divine commands of temple deities

(the opposite of “othering”) and compares it with the ways in which kings in their royal orders might lay claim to what is “ours” (as a political strategy of “othering”).

Interaction with Others: People, Gods, Ghosts, and Demons in the Central Himalayas Prof. John Leavitt, Université de Montréal

The popular religion of the Hindu population of the Central Himalayas (state of Uttarakhand, northern India) involves a clearly distinguished pantheon—and pandaemonion—of beings: gods (*dyàpt*), ghosts (*bhūt*), and demons (*daït*). These are “others” in that they are beings with whom humans do not come into immediate contact in the ordinary round of daily life. Contacting and communicating with them takes place only in distinct, well-defined circumstances, which can either be sought or, in the case of ghosts and demons, can result from ill-conceived actions or being in the wrong place at

the wrong time. The domain of these beings forms a hierarchical realm of intensity of power and breadth of dominion parallel to that found in the human realm, leading some people to propose explicit parallels between divine/demonic and political relations. This talk will explore human interactions with these beings and ways of conceptualizing them.

Panel 2

Othered-Mothers: Pregnancy and Virtue in Early Buddhist Narrative Prof. Vanessa Sasson, Collège Marianopolis

Research often emphasizes the inauspiciousness of the mother in Buddhist literature. Although mothers are hailed as embodiments of compassion, they are also associated with the mire of samsaric bog, because – like Kisa Gotamī and so many others – mothers are deemed incapable of letting their children go. Their bodies are, moreover, regularly described as putrid spaces built to confine their fetuses. The unborn suffer each time the mother moves and are squished between the smelly tracts of the digestive system. In this talk, I will focus on a further expression of this paradoxical relationship to motherhood: alongside arguments of embodied disgustingness and perpetual inauspiciousness, the pregnant body is also often associated with virtue. Focusing on early Pali hagiography, this paper will explore narratives that make the connection between virtue and pregnancy abundantly clear.

The Brahman : Xenology in Amīr Khusrow’s *Alexandrine Mirror* Prof. Prashant Keshavmurthy, Université McGill

When in around 1302 in Delhi he completed a response poem called *The Alexandrine Mirror* to Nizāmī’s *Alexander Book* (1202), Amīr Khusrow transformed the arc Nizāmī had traced from Alexander’s imperial adventuring to his humbling as a prophet. In Khusrow’s re-telling Alexander was a “divinely inspired” Sufi king, not a prophet.

Khusrow tells a striking tale just after a long chapter on, among other topics, the epistemological status of his narrative as a history filled with improbable events. This tale, a short chapter unto itself, is set in Syria and concerns a man who doubted the literalness of the Prophet’s Ascension and was humbled for it. The plot, however, derives wholly from the *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* where it concerns a Brahman’s experience of the relativity of space and time. This paper will make a case for the monologic submission to Sufi royal reason in Khusrow’s poem of the Brahman of early *kalām* or Islamic speculative theology and of the Advaitic monist Sanskrit tradition available to Khusrow in what were probably vernacular oral forms.

Eating Together? : Writing Caste into Food History Prof. Rachel Berger, Université Concordia

While eating remains a primary articulation of caste identity and social exclusion, scholars of food and eating spanning a variety of disciplines continue to ignore the politics of inclusion and exclusion when considering the unfolding of food and its multiple meanings in the South Asian past and present. In this paper, I use my research on *vanaspati ghee* to orient the bio-moral and commercial nature of the substance around the question of who is allowed to consume it. In so doing, I touch on *Gau Mata*, Ambedkarite politics, the use of trans-fats and the large scale politics of protest in an

attempt to reorient food discourses around the question of social inclusion in twentieth century India.

La reconnaissance juridique du 3^{ième} genre en Inde Prof. Karine Bates, Université de Montréal

Être « autre » que femme ou homme en Asie du Sud n'est pas un phénomène qui a été reconnu seulement récemment. *Hijra, kothi, shiv-shakti* et autres groupes se sont formés au fil des siècles avec des statuts sociaux variables selon les régions et les circonstances. Ce qui marque l'histoire contemporaine de l'Inde, c'est la reconnaissance juridique du 3^{ième} genre en Inde. À travers l'analyse du jugement de 2014 de la Cour Suprême de l'Inde, des débats autour du *Transgender Bill* de 2016 et d'exemples ethnographiques, les processus sociojuridiques qui ont mené à la création de nouvelles catégories juridiques seront explorés ainsi que des trajectoires individuelles d'auto-identification à ces catégories.

Panel 3

Kabir comme instaurateur d'une affinité religieuse universelle, Sonia Benchaib, Université de Montréal

La question de l'affiliation religieuse de Kabir en demeure une d'actualité. On attribue à tort ou à raison à Kabir, d'une part une hindouisation progressive, ou même une brahmanisation qui tend à le soustraire à ses affiliations musulmanes. Ainsi, il est venu à être considéré par la plupart des hindous comme un nirguna bhakta qui fait partie de la tradition de Sant des poètes-saints en Inde du Nord. Il est également supposé (à tort) avoir été un disciple du Râmânanda. Kabir, à la fois hindou vishnouïte et musulman soufi, est aussi lié au shivaïte *Natha yoga* et Gorakhnath de l'Inde du Nord. Selon une légende, il est aussi né de parents musulmans. Kabir transcende par son œuvre poético religieuse toutes les barrières religieuses et les dogmes. Son ascension mystique et philosophique est un enchaînement qui transcende cette voie différentielle des groupes religieux en Inde. La vraie question demeure selon nous un examen des traits fondamentaux de l'œuvre de Kabir et de son impact sur le climat religieux et social dans l'Inde moderne. Perçu comme un exemple de tolérance religieuse, et même comme le précurseur d'une religion universelle ou synthétique (hindou-musulmane), nous tenterons de situer la contribution de Kabir et son apport dans le dialogue interculturel et interreligieux à la lumière des développements du penseur Tzvetan Todorov sur l'altérité des « nous et les autres ».

Guru Nanak: Otherness in the Construction of the Bhakti Movement, Félix Salcedo, Université de Montréal

The construction of the idea of a bhakti movement in the first half of the 20th century as part of the intellectual and spiritual endeavor to create the constitution of India as a modern nation-state independent from the British Empire, shows the lasting dialectic between identity and otherness, between the particularly regional and the unifying national, and between the religious and the political. The high diversity, which characterizes the Indian landscape, with its different languages, religions, cultures and regional arrangements, implies that every effort in establishing their common identity as a nation needs to address the problem of alterity. This proves true in the construction of the

idea of a bhakti movement that transcends and integrates all religions, all languages, all castes, all differences in genre, all regional identities, and all historical constraints. Guru Nanak, the bhakti poet of the 16th century, who defined himself as neither Hindu nor Muslim, with his universal spirituality, will contribute unintentionally to the Indian mosaic. Founding a new community and developing the religious institutions required for it to thrive and last, will paradoxically result in the birth of a new religion several centuries later, a new “other,” Sikhism.

Comment allier altérité et unité; unicité, liberté et universalité, d’après le maître Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov (1900-1986), Pascale Frémond, Université de Montréal

L’altérité peut se constater dans tous les domaines de la vie physique de l’être humain : apparences, systèmes de croyance, cultures définissent les êtres en fonction d’un certain nombre de caractéristiques qui les distinguent les uns des autres. Pourtant, d’après le maître Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov, dont l’enseignement se situe au confluent de l’Orient et de l’Occident, dans la lignée du maître bulgare Peter Deunov, leurs besoins fondamentaux et leur structure psychique et spirituelle sont les mêmes, et dans leurs composantes divines, ils sont même un en Dieu, en leur qualité d’étincelles divines dans l’Esprit. Chaque être est unique, selon lui, il a été créé libre par Dieu et en tant que tel, assume la responsabilité de ses actes, mais il ne trouve son plein épanouissement que lorsqu’il aime le Créateur et Sa création, quand son âme réussit à embrasser l’univers entier dans l’amour universel, comme l’être cosmique qu’il a toujours été, et qu’il traduit par des actes dans son quotidien sa dimension universelle, participant alors à l’avènement d’une ère de fraternité entre tous les êtres humains.

Le genre et la sexualité dans la construction identitaire du *hindutva*, Justine Laporta, Université de Montréal

Le concept du *hindutva*, ou de l’ « hindouïté », est un concept central dans les revendications du mouvement nationaliste hindou puisqu’il vise à définir la culture indienne selon une conception construite de l’hindouisme. Les nombreuses organisations faisant activement la promotion du *hindutva* font partie du grand réseau de la *Sangh Parivar* et opèrent sur la scène politique indienne comme dans la société civile. La présentation tentera de mettre en lumière les façons dont s’articulent le genre et la sexualité dans la construction identitaire des organisations de la société civile du mouvement nationaliste hindou. D’abord, les idées socialement construites de la masculinité et de la féminité viendront prescrire la participation bien distincte des hommes et des femmes dans la construction de la nation. Finalement, l’hypersexualisation du Musulman et la notion de viol viendront tous deux nourrir un discours d’hyper protection des femmes et de légitimation de la militarisation.