

Roots, Routes and a New Awakening

Ananta Kumar Giri
Editor

Roots, Routes and a New Awakening

Beyond One and Many and Alternative Planetary
Futures

palgrave
macmillan

Editor

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ISBN 978-981-15-7121-3 ISBN 978-981-15-7122-0 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7122-0>

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The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

*For Lawrence Cohen, Mukul Kumar and Stefan Johnsson
Inspiring Travelers for a New Awakening of Roots and Routes and
Alternative Planetary Futures*

FOREWORD

THE ONE AND THE MANY, THE MANY AND THE ONE: ROOTING THE HUMAN ROUTES

The human quest for survival is part of the quest for understanding the world, a world which is populated by humans, non-humans and other phenomena of the world. The phenomenological project of Edmund Husserl couched in making a distinction between the natural attitude, the phenomenological attitude, “*noesis*” (act of consciousness) and *noema* (intentional object as experienced) has continued to be central to understanding the place of humans in the world and how their experience can lead to *apodictic/apodeictic* knowledge that will guarantee harmony of the self with the other. The self could be the individual person, an ethnic group or even a nation. The other could also be the individual, the group or nation, detached from the self (see Edmund Husserl 1960 & 1975). The undermining of human sentiments, passions, prejudices and predilections did not help the Husserlian phenomenological project as these factors bordering on human sentiments cannot be totally underplayed in human social relations and cognitive activities. The problem is now between thorough-going subjectivity and objectivity. The existentialists, particularly Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, provided a midway solution of intersubjectivity (Oyeshile 2006). Intersubjectivity has been a very viable and feasible tool of organizing the logjams involved in human social experience that resonates in

many theoretical analysis of human society that is a manifestation of the dialectics of roots and routes.

The perennial and problematic issues of roots, routes, identities, social creativity, cultural regeneration, planetary realizations and a new awakening that form the discourse of this book, edited by Professor Ananta Kumar Giri, exposes the nature of human conflict and the need to find lasting solutions to them in order to live happy, harmonious and development-oriented life. We can only pretend if we claim, advertently or inadvertently, that all is well with our planet. The crisis we confront in today's world spares no one, no group, no society, no country and no civilization. Malgorzata Czarnocka captures the crisis thus:

The causes initiating today's civilizational crisis are differently identified. However, it is commonly perceived that the crisis already spread over the entire human world—it has invaded all geographical regions and civilizational spheres—social-political, economic, ecological, cultural, also the spheres of individual as well as collective human everyday life and personal existence. Our time of turmoil has generated a combustible mixture of threats: arrogance, irresponsibility and the complete dereliction of duty by ruling classes in many countries of the world, threats to security, global threats to national and international peace, threats to social order, increasing inequalities, the degradation of natural environment (Czarnocka 2019: 6).

One cannot pretend about the veracity of the situation as described above by Czarnocka. It all boils down to the need for co-operation, tolerance, human solidarity, recognition of identities and accommodation of differences. It simply underscores the need to reconcile disparate interests for the good of all. Let me draw some examples from the Yoruba Culture of Nigeria of how this can be done based on the assumption that the one is part of the many and the many is part of the one as earlier echoed by Heraclitus and Parmenides. In fact, Empidocles of Akragas postulated that the disparate primitive elements such as earth, air, fire and water are subjected to the forces of love and strife. It is love that unites all the primitive elements while strife separates or disunites the basic elements. It bears pointing out that the issue of unity has always remained a major philosophical preoccupation from the ancient times. It has however taken a new dimension in contemporary world as can be discerned in social relations among humans across the globe.

Morality called *Iwa* (character) plays a crucial role in the harmonization of disparate interests in Yoruba society. A well-behaved person is called *Omoluwabi*. An *Omoluwabi* is an epitome of morality because he among

other virtues gives consideration to the well-being of others. The consideration of human well-being is very crucial in establishing and sustaining a harmonious world. Drawing from the Yoruba example, the well-being of the world community is ensured based on the well-being of every member of the human community. And because the individual is a social being, any decision by him, which is immoral, would affect the well-being of other members of the society and subsequently retard human development, peace and security. It is the duty of every community, therefore, to ensure that individuals imbibe moral virtues through education, communal living, reward and sanctions.

The dictates of *Iwa* (character) within the Yoruba society make individual's freedom a relative one, relative to the survival of the individuals in Yoruba community. It is a means to the good life of man and his community. The following aphorisms underscore the relative freedom of the Yoruba individual:

1. *Ti eye ko ba feye niron, oju orun teye lai fara kan ra* (If birds do not want to create inconvenience for themselves, the sky is large enough for every bird to fly).
2. *Enikan ki je ki ile fe* (One person does not consume all the goods and expect expansion or progress of the land).
3. *Owo die die ni ara nfe* (The body/person deserves some respect).
4. *Owo ki ndowo lorun* (One person's business endeavour should not create inconvenience for another person's business endeavour).
5. *Ti a ba soko so ja, ara ile eni ni nba* (If we throw a stone in the market, it may hit a person of our own household).

It should be noted that it is within the communal moral universe that the Yoruba individual exercises his freedom, anatomy, right and authenticity not in absolute terms but in relative terms as part of the community. This is taken to be a major defining feature of the African society and is aptly expressed by John Mbiti thus, "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am" (Mbiti 1969: 108).

Extrapolating from the Yoruba moral universe, certain perennial problems can be addressed. For instance the problem of identity and difference. Identity is important be it ethnic identity, social identity and national identity but it must not metamorphose to politics of identity that pitches one group against the other as we have in many countries today. We

cannot eradicate or eliminate ethnic identity but manage it to produce greater goods. This is because ethnic identity is primordial. Sometimes it is prior to national identity in multi-ethnic societies or coterminous with national identity in a situation where a single ethnic group forms the nationality, but this latter case is few. Again, universalism should not be essentialised and should be purged from Eurocentric hegemonic tendencies.

The essays in this book reflect, in an unambiguous term, the facts of common human ancestry (roots) and interdependency in the navigation (routes) of human flux of experience. The imperative of joint survival on the human planet must be supported by all. The COVID-19 pandemic has once again underscored the blunt fact of human interdependence. We either survive together or perish together. I strongly urge that we work towards the former option. This to my mind is the central message of this book. The one leads to the many and the many leads to the one. Identity and difference are two inevitable sides of the same phenomenon. We must therefore endeavour to live as members of the same human family while we continually manage our differences to realize the universal identity of humanity.

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PREFACE

Today we are witnessing new complexities and violence in the dynamics of roots and routes in self, culture, politics, society and the world. With the rising nationalism which is taking a xenophobic character and is directed against others who do not belong to one's so-called roots and hatred and violence directed against travelers from routes, we need a new political and spiritual awakening about the integral entwinement of roots and routes and its contemporary evolutionary transformations. This book, *Roots, Routes and a New Awakening: Beyond One and Many and Alternative Planetary Futures*, is a humble effort in this direction which follows the accompanying volume, *Cross-Fertilizing Roots and Routes: Identities, Social Creativities, Cultural Regeneration and Planetary Realizations* from Palgrave Macmillan. These two volumes can be read together as part of our effort to rethink identities, social creativity cultural regeneration and alternative planetary futures.

This book is dedicated to Lawrence Cohen, Mukul Kumar and Stefan Johnsson, inspiring travelers for a new awakening of roots and Routes and alternative planetary futures. Lawrence Cohen is a creative anthropologist of our times. Born in Boston and studying both Anthropology and Medicine at Harvard, he came to India to study lives of old people. He has then continued many-sided engagement with India. His work *No Old Age in India* is a remarkable work. Cohen cultivates an anthropology of care and concern and cultivates roots and routes in his own creative ways. Mukul Kumar was a dedicated sociologist and scholar of poverty and rural development. Mukul taught at Institute of Rural Management, Anand and inspired many students and colleagues to have a deeper

and broader view of poverty, exclusion and social transformation. Mukul was a dear friend. When I wrote to him a month ago, I got an email from his daughter that Mukul is no more. He could not survive the cancer that visited him. But Mukul lives in the hearts of students and friends he nurtures and new ways of cultivating roots and routes that his life and work embodies. Stefan Johnsson is a creative thinker who has explored many important issues of history, anthropology and cultural studies inspiring us to look afresh issues of roots and routes. Stefan is also a concerned and committed public intellectual working with the creative and artistic community at large in Sweden. His works such as *A Brief History of the Masses: Three Revolutions* is an important work in cultural history which can help us rethink anew the issues of identities, social creativity, violence and cultural regeneration.

I am grateful to all the contributors of this volume for their kindness, patience, support and contributions. I am grateful to my dear friend Professor Olatunji A. Oyeshille for his insightful Foreword and to my dear and respected friends Kanchana Mahadevan, A. Osman Farah, Paul Schwartzentruber, Maroof Shah and Bishop Thomas Menarampally and Kanchana for joining us in our Afterword dialogues on roots, routes and a new awakening. I thank Vishnu Varatharajan, a contributor to the volume, for his kind and invaluable help in taking care of many chores of the volume. I cannot express my thanks enough for the inspiring and encouraging support from Connie, Li of Palgrave Macmillan. I also thank Sara Crowley Vigneau for her kind interest in and support for this work. Finally I thank colleagues in our Institute especially Professor P.G. Babu, our Director, and Mr. T.R. Ramakrishnan, our Administrative Officer, and Mr. Ashok R. Chandran and Mr. A. Arivazhagan of our Publication Office, Mr. R. Muruggan, our Librarian, for creating a creative atmosphere of dialogue and learning in our Institute.

Finally I hope this work helps us in overcoming our contemporary anxiety about roots and routes and create new movements of awakening and alternative futures for all of us. As part of our journey, I offer my following poem:

Hermeneutics:

Beyond Fixed Locations and Rivers of Co-Realizations

Ananta Kumar Giri

Is hermeneutics

Only about where are you from

What about where have you been

Where are you going–
 Your journey.
 You say you come from Jerusalem and Athens
 But what about journey with Benares?
 Is Jerusalem not linked to Benares?
 Athens with Taxila?
 Abarhamic with Indic
 Abrahamic with *Brahmavidya* [knowledge of Brahman]
 Are Jerusalem, Athens and Varanasi
 fixed locations
 Or rivers of co-realizations?
 Can hermeneutics be a new prayer with roots and routes
 A new journey with one and many
 A new dance with Aspirations and Futures
 Across Tradition?¹

As we move across roots, routes and towards a new awakening and hermeneutics of life, we can also draw inspiration from the adventures of relationship and consciousness that Savitri, a symbol and reality of life and spirit, undertakes in Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri*:

Our life is a march to a victory never won
 This wave of being longing for delight
 This eager turmoil of unsatisfied strengths
 This long far file of forward-striving hopes [...] (Sri Aurobindo 1993: 199).

Chennai, India
 May 7, 2020, Buddha Purnima

Ananta Kumar Giri

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¹[Written on August 13, 2018 during World Congress of Philosophy, Beijing and updated on 23, 2020 at home in Kotivakkam, Chennai]

CONTENTS

1	Cross-Fertilizing Roots and Routes: An Introduction and an Invitation	1
	Ananta Kumar Giri	
Part I Cross-Fertilizing Roots and Routes: Border Crossings in Self, Societies and Spiritual Awakening		
2	Beyond One and Many: Deconstructing the Notion of Identity	9
	Nishant Alphonse Irudayadason	
3	Siva Tantra Rediscovered: Transforming the Etic Routes and Emic Roots of Indian Spirituality	25
	Justin M. Hewitson	
4	Semiotic Roots and Buddhist Routes in Phenomenology and Intercultural Philosophy: A Peircean Study of Abhidharma Buddhist Theories of Consciousness and Perception	47
	Alina Therese Lettner	

5	Ecological Interconnectedness: Entwined Selves, Transcendent and Immanent	75
	Sarah Louise Gates	
6	From Root to Return Routes: A Brief Tantric Description of the Passage from Being to beings	99
	Rafaela Campos de Carvalho	
7	Roots, Routes, and Creative Transformations: New Perspectives on Transitions in Human Society	117
	Subhash Sharma	
8	Thoreau—Tolstoy—Gandhi: The Origin of Satyagraha	133
	Christian Bartolf, Dominique Miething, and Vishnu Varatharajan	
9	“The Gospel According to Babylon”: The Rastafarian Challenge to Eurocentric Theological Discourse in the Caribbean	149
	Amitha Shantiago	
 Part II Roots, Routes and a New Awakening: Beyond One and Many and Alternative Planetary Futures		
10	Cross-Fertilizing Roots and Routes: Towards a New Art of Border Crossing	163
	Ananta Kumar Giri	
11	Multicentric World and Nationalism	179
	Boike Rehbein	
12	Roots, Routes, and a New Awakening: Walking and Meditating with Raimon Panikkar	193
	Joseph Prabhu	

- 13 **Overcoming Evil as Creation of Others as Enemies: Roots, Routes and a New Awakening of Plural Identities** 201
Kathrin Bouvot
- 14 **Muddled Roots and Diverse Routes of Reality: Understanding Hindu Rāṣṭra and Gandhi Rāṣṭra Through the Myth of Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita** 221
Vishnu Varatharajan
- 15 **Roots, Routes and a New Awakening: *Rupantara*, a Transformative Initiative in Co-Learning and Training of Tribal Teachers of Odisha, India** 235
Mahendra Kumar Mishra
- 16 **Roots and Routes and the Origins of Urban Theory: A Journey to “Stadtluft Macht Frei”** 255
Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt
- 17 **Utopias and Dystopias in Literature and Life** 287
Peter Hechs
- 18 **Mysticism in the Tree of Anthropocene: The Feminine Tree of Life and the Virtual Sphere** 309
Umar Nizarudeen
- 19 **Roots, Routes, and Crossing Borders: Embracing Cosmopolitanism in a Transcultural World** 321
David Blake Willis
- Afterwords**
- Roots, Routes and a New Awakening: Towards a Festival of Dialogues and Planetary Conversations** 335
Kanchana Mahadevan

Beyond the Restrictive Sociopolitical Autonomy and Sovereignty	343
A. Osman Farah	
Roots, Routes and a New Awakening: Remembering the History of Canada in Times of Corona	353
Paul Schwartzentruber	
The Hidden Common Roots of Diverse Traditions: Revisiting the Route of Traditionalism	357
Muhammad Maroof Shah	
A Mystic's Mission Today: Propagate the Truth of Co-belonging	373
Thomas Menamparampil	
Index	383

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LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 7.1	Tradition Modernity Dialogue matrix	123
Fig. 7.2	A perspective on Indian history, beginning with Shiva-Shakti Civilization in Himalayas	130

LIST OF TABLES

Table 7.1	Transitions in human societies (perspective I)	118
Table 7.2	Transitions in human societies (perspective II)	119
Table 7.3	Transitions in human societies (perspective III)	120
Table 7.4	Transitions in human societies (perspective IV)	120
Table 7.5	Transitions in human societies (perspective V)	121
Table 7.6	Transitions in Indian society	126