

4th Biennial Conference of the Czech Association for Social Anthropology
(CASA)

AMBIGUITY

B2 Ambiguities of reproduction and maternity

Saturday, October 1, 2016

Room B (Nr. 116) 11:30 AM – 1 PM

Chair: Petra Ezzeddine

The Ambiguous Nature of Activism: Between, for and away from Kids

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This paper deals with the ambiguous nature of childbirth activism and women who have become engaged in related civic activities due to their critical childbirth experience.

Giving birth is a turning life experience in women's lives and lives of their families, and it is especially so if such experience is not entirely positive. Many of the women who described their experience with hospital birth as traumatic in narrative interviews therefore decided to take action and contribute to a change. However, the range of actions they have undertaken considerably differs. While some women started to organize educational lectures and happenings in their towns and villages, others joined already-existing activist groups, and yet some other women are happy enough to restrict their activities to "cyber-activism" in their social network groups. Still, many of them feel substantially limited in their efforts to change the Czech birth care system for the "good" of children-to-be-born, as at the same time – they are – after all - primary care-givers of children, thus struggling to be with or away from them.

In this paper I build on long-term ethnography of childbirth activism and the natural childbirth movement in the Czech Republic, and in particular on 25 narrative interviews with women who wanted to have natural childbirth. My aims are twofold. First, I explore ambiguity present in these women's actions as related to childbirth and the natural childbirth movement while I ask: what are the boundaries between being activist and not? Second, I discuss the conceptual ambiguity of the civic activism, in particular in relation to the concept of health social movement.

Wet-nurses and Surrogate mothers. Ambiguity in the construction of Fragmented motherhood? An old and contemporary dilemma

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As anthropological literature reveals, human milk has always been linked to the construction of motherhood. Breastfeeding and maternity form a cultural ideal in many societies. What does happen, when breast milk does not come from the biological mother but from another woman, a wet-nurse? Can we talk about "fragmented motherhood"? Mainly based on an ethnohistorical study done in Spain, my focus is on the role of the Pasiega domestic wet-nurse in the construction of milk kinship when her milk circulated and was

shared through the process of breastfeeding babies of the upper-classes: aristocracy, bourgeoisie and royalty. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to show that the open debate we have today on fragmented maternity (e.g. when referring to surrogacy, as a result of advances in assisted reproductive technologies) as well as the relationship between kinship and market is, contrary to many assertions, with the historical precedent of wet-nursing, not new in history.

Research of maternal health. What we already know

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Studies show substantial health disparities among migrant and non-migrant women in terms of their birth outcomes and overall perinatal health. Migration is seen as a risk factor for health of women and to become a migrant mother means “crisis of the crisis” (Song 2016: 38). The aim of the presentation is to discuss several ambiguities which occur when researching maternal health of migrants. We reviewed 124 studies published in English and Czech language focused in maternal health of migrant women. Researchers show that culture is important factor influencing the access and quality of maternity care and the studies compare various categories of migrant and/or non-migrant women. First, ambiguity is related to the definition when a woman belongs to one or the other category. Second, ambiguity is related to epidemiological paradox. This paradox points out the relation between acculturation and birth outcomes.