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

# AMBIGUITY

# C2 Politics of Identity

## Saturday, October 1, 2016

## Room C (Nr. 209) 11:30 AM – 1 PM

## Chair: Dan Sosna

*Ambiguity as an ethnographic condition: Between the post-apartheid field and Czech academia*

**Vít Zdrálek**

Department of Musicology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague

Ambiguity has been the defining condition of my ethnomusicological research in South Africa since its inception in 2006.On the one hand, there was I as a Czech student from a specific family and intellectual upbringing researching and writing about a South African township music. The situation of someone from a post-communist country and a post-Soviet satellite, with its countless ramifications, doing research in/on the 'Postcolony' is unusual enough in ethno/musicology and cultural/social anthropology to be taken for granted. On the other hand, there was my subject, an 'average' black middle-aged male popular township musician, a man of rural upbringing, yet of the city, who has, since the 1980s, found refugee from the unbearable migrant worker situation in the cultural complex of the Zion Christian Church, the largest African-initiated church in the country, drawing on both missionary and indigenous worldviews and practices. And then there am I again, an ethnomusicologist in the Czech musicological department and humanities, in positions no less ambiguous.

I discussed these problems thoroughly in my dissertation while writing a biographic ethnography of this man's musical – as cultural and social – experience. Reflexivity, detail and fragmentariness turned out to condition the text's form and structure as a result. The term 'coherent ambivalence' appeared to best describe the musician's complex position in the end. In my presentation, I would like to discuss some of the above-mentioned ambiguities as potentially productive intellectual stimuli in the first place and ambiguity in general as an important condition of the ethnographic practice.

*Performative identity: Presenting Hlučínsko in the Parliament*

**Johana Musalkova**

Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford

In this paper I explore how groups may attempt to manage difficult heritage and contested identities through joint performative acts. In the late May 2016, delegates from Hlučínsko, a borderland region with a volatile past, went to Prague in order to present the region to the Parliament of the Czech Republic. The objective was to depict the republic's periphery as a thriving land with a great potential for growth of both industry and tourism, should it be provided with much needed investments. However, facing the political, historical, linguistic and cultural complexities of the former Prussian Silesia, problematic issues arise in relation to the question of how Hlučínsko should be performed to the Prague others.

I am particularly interested in how various Hlučínsko emissaries, coming from different background and thus promoting various aspects of the borderland region, negotiate what the desirable image of Hlučínsko should be as well as how it should be presented. Special attention is given to the moments of tensions, or perhaps

even conflicts, which are theorized as arriving from what I call 'consistency errors'. A term borrowed from the computer science.

*Innovations in Ethnic Entrepreneurship and Emerging Everyday Multiculturalism. Vietnamese Diaspora in the Czech Republic*

**Jakub Grygar and Karel Čada**

Institute of Sociological Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague

The paper explores innovations in ethnic entrepreneurship with respect to interethnic relations and everyday multiculturalism. The impact of these innovations on the evolution of multicultural conditions is studied through case studies of the ethnic entrepreneurship of Vietnamese living in the Czech Republic. I am interested in how innovations, which originally evolved in the context of ethnic economy, are spreading out beyond their ethnic boundaries and how these innovations, penetrating the broader society, transform existing socio-material relationships. Special attention is paid to the relationship between everyday encounters with cultural diversity and the discourse of multiculturalism in crisis, as well as that between conviviality and conflicting situations. The paper's theoretical background lies in studies of ethnic entrepreneurship studies and everyday multiculturalism developed in the field of culture sociology and anthropological studies of material culture. The paper is empirically based in ethnographical mapping of the innovation spread and in-depth interviews.

# Room C (Nr. 209) 2 - 3:30 PM

# Chair: Vít Zdrálek

*The ambivalent Taiwaneseness*

**Adam Horálek**

Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of Pardubice

A long-term discourse on Taiwanese identity and independence has re-emerged after the new president Tsai Ing-wen from the Democratic Development Party was elected in 2016. Even though the controversial topics of Taiwaneseness and Taiwanese independence were not a part of the official presidential campaign, the general public expects these topics to be renegotiated. The worldwide audience is mostly aware of the uneasy relationship of Taiwan with the People's Republic of China and so called "One China Policy". But there is another side of it as well – dealing with Taiwanese identity inside Taiwan. Taiwaneseness is ambivalent label which may refer to the local-born Chinese, to all citizens of Taiwan, or to the aboriginal peoples of Taiwan. The last reference is the most traditional and controversial. Being Taiwanese was till recently considered as being aboriginal, non-civilized, underdeveloped, illiterate, problematic, wild, sexy, etc. In many ways, the aboriginal peoples of Taiwan were of similar social stigma like European Roma people. However, in last two decades the social climate has changed and Taiwaneseness became a competitive political concept to Chineseness in Taiwan. Aboriginal peoples and cultures has been rehabilitated and put on the pedestal of the national Taiwanese pride. Still, the integration of aboriginal peoples is in the pioneering stage. The paper will focus on the ambiguity of aboriginal Taiwaneseness in the modern understanding of the concept demonstrated on case of Hualien County.

*Ambiguity in the perception of rituals in modern Toraja*

**Michaela Budiman**

Institute of South and Central Asia, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague

The presentation introduces research on Toraja rituals that I carried out in Sulawesi, Indonesia. It discusses the religious transformation in the recent decades that eventually led to contemporary ambiguity in the perception of being a well-respected and religious modern representative of the Toraja ethnic group.

The presented material is the result of two fieldtrips totalling seven months. During these expeditions, I attended Toraja funeral rituals and also conducted participant observation and interviews with selected informants, priests, and the last living expert on the autochthonous religion *Aluk Todolo*, Mr. Tato' Dena'.

The ambiguity in being a "good" Toraja arises from the social pressure to successfully integrate two almost contradictory elements – adherence to Christianity (or occasionally to Islam) and preservation of the ancestral traditions and the customary law *adat* in accordance with *Aluk Todolo*. The endeavour to fuse these two elements is clearly evident in the case of the present-day Toraja funeral rituals that are a syncretic phenomenon. The attempt to implement this fusion leads to societal uncertainty of desirable religious practices, and plays a major role in shaping the contemporary forms of rituals as well as of the society at large.

It is very likely that no relevant shift in the form of rituals will occur in the near future because *adat* and *Aluk Todolo* are very deeply rooted in the Toraja culture. Nevertheless, it is possible that the fusion of Christianity and *Aluk Todolo* in Toraja religious practices will no longer be considered in conflict.

### *New Urban Politics and the re-imagination of Subaltern identity in the Global South*

**Aditya Mohanty**

Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture, University of Aberdeen

With the onset of neo-liberal reforms in postcolonial contexts like that of India, one ponders as to how does identity politics transverse itself vis-à-vis intersectional entities like that of say 'class'. To elaborate, while "identity politics" has often carried pejorative connotations, it also reduces collective struggles to 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1987). It is in this context that the proposed paper engages with multifarious contestations in an urban space and transcends the dialectics between identity and class based struggles. It does so by looking into the imbrications of such contestations between State and civil society actors, as seen in the case of *valmikis*, (an erstwhile subaltern group belonging to the *dalit* caste or backward strata within India's majoritarian Hindu society) in Delhi. It ethnographically investigates into the socio-cultural, economic and political strands of two Valmiki Colonies in Delhi, one located in the city centre (viz., Mandir Marg area) and the other in the outskirts (viz., Trilokpuri area). Seen from an urban anthropological point of view, the study proposes to see as to how do conflating/ conflicting identities of a community impacts the actions, orientations, groupings and the bases of citizenship. In so doing howsoever, the paper uses the concept of 'difference-in-itself' (Deleuze 1994) to make sense of how in such a moment of political catharsis, do diverse actors operating within the power matrix differentially apply permutations and combinations of their socio-cultural and economic capital. Finally, the paper is interesting for it employs a post-structural approach to clear the ambiguity in anthropological research on socially excluded groups (like that of the *Valmiki* castes in this case) by unpacking the material bases of subaltern agency for understanding the intertwining of 'civil' and 'political' spaces (Chatterjee 2004).