

SESSION 3

DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVES IN IDENTITY POLITICS

PAPER ABSTRACTS

What to Do with the Dance? Demarcation of a Decent Cultural Practice for Indigenous Muslim Identity in Cameroon

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In this paper I explore the debate surging around the indigenous youth dance of the pastoral Mbororo Fulani of Cameroon. The debate is related to a broader socio-religious change within which increasing pressure is put on the Mbororo to abandon their “coarse” cultural practices in order to attain a more decent Muslim identity. In this process *wamarde*, the Mbororo dance, has become a strong symbol of their ignorance and cultural backwardness and, due to its alleged un-Islamic character as well as unwanted social consequences, is nowadays largely forbidden in many regions in Cameroon. Among the Mbororo themselves the debate on *wamarde* and the measures taken to restrain it have generated different responses. On the one hand, many urban activists of the Mbororo development organization MBOSCUA (*Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association of Cameroon*), in their campaign for polishing the indigenous self-presentation of their people by shifting it towards a modern Muslim identity, have for long spoken for the prohibition of the dance in its current form and context. On the other hand, in my research area in the rural Adamaoua Region, the Mbororo dance has been recontextualised by transforming it into *zikiri* (Arab. *dhikr*), a religious worship practice in which men, or women, dance and sing religious songs in a circle. This transformation has taken place in step with the recent Mbororo (intra)religious mass conversion to Tijaniyya, one of the Islamic Sufi orders. Drawing from my recent fieldwork in Cameroon, the paper inquires into these processes by looking at the changes in the Mbororo conception of the *wamarde* dance, as well as in the institutional frames within which it is practiced, in connection with the wider religiopolitical climates in which the contents of the Mbororo collective self-perception are currently contested.

Performing Identity: the transformation of a Tangsa festival in Assam, north-east India

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The Tangsas are a small ethnic group (related to the Naga) who have migrated to India from Myanmar probably within the last couple of centuries and have settled in the north-east Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. In the last few decades, rapid changes have occurred to their lifestyles and to their traditional practices as a result of their migration down from the hills to the plains and their acceptance of the ‘modern’ way of life in a democratic state.

Furthermore, conversion of most of the Tangsa population to Christianity has implied giving up many of their old cultural practices. The newly converted Christian Tangsa had initially believed that religion could suffice as culture, but many have understood now that it cannot help them secure their ethnic identity. On the other hand, the few

non-Christian Tangsa still left have also realised that putting religious divide before ethnic unity could lead to their annihilation. Therefore, there have been intense efforts in recent years, on the part of both groups, to come together to jointly celebrate a traditional Tangsa festival, in an attempt to retrieve a common ethnic identity.

In this paper I wish to take a closer look at the Wihu-kuh festival organised jointly by all the Tangsa living in Assam last year in the light of smaller festivals organised by the non-Christian Tangsa in earlier years, to observe the compromises that have been made from both sides in order to bring the Christian Tangsa back into the fold. The factors determining the final form of the festival will also be analysed in view of the impact this representation has on the Tangsa self-image and their projected identity. In doing so, I hope to illustrate that the 'new' Tangsa identity has been consciously fashioned in a form which not only enables internal consolidation but which also bolsters the social and political position of the Tangsa in the wider world around them. Their principal aim is to project a new multi-faceted identity which draws from both their traditional ethnic past and their modern Christian present.

Defining "the Real Komi": Everyday Practices and Worldview

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Our paper is based on our joint fieldwork (2006-2011) among the Komi people in Russia. The presentation will be dedicated to discussion of the concept of "the real Komi" in comparison with ideas concerning the *Kydya Roch* ('the Chaff's Russian'). Our aim is to demonstrate, how these concepts are treated by contemporary Komi people through discussions concerning a variety of everyday practices and religious ideas.

Mexico's Programa Pueblos Mágicos: Negotiating Culture and Adapting to Tourism in a Zapotec Village

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In 2001, the Ministry of Tourism of Mexico launched a successful project called the *Programa Pueblos Mágicos* ('The Program of Magical Towns') that promotes tourism to 'typical' Mexican communities. This paper focuses on a Zapotec village of Capulálpam de Méndez in the State of Oaxaca, one of the 40 communities currently involved in the program. In less than a decade, Capulálpam has transformed from a village with virtually no visitors for touristic purposes into a regional hub of cultural and ecotourism, mainly owing to its nomination as a '*pueblo mágico*' in 2007. The paper discusses the adaptation of the local population to the program and its implications, as well as the diverse local perceptions of the impact of tourism on the local culture and identity. These perceptions are reminiscent of the scholarly debates between the critics and proponents of tourism in the discipline of anthropology, central to which are the notions of 'development,' 'cultural authenticity,' and 'commodification of heritage.' Many villagers associate the tourist influx with development, material gains, and increased employment opportunities. Others perceive tourism as a threat to communal intimacy, local culture, morality and ways of life, and accuse it of creating dependency and increasing inequality in the village. The pro- and anti-tourism divide coincides – partly at least – with certain pre-existing divisions and hierarchies in the village.

National and religious identities at the borderline. Conclusions to the research in Ujkowice and Łętownia, 2008-2009

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In my presentation and paper I would like to discuss the results of an extended research project conducted by me and a small research group of my colleagues in years 2008-09 in the villages Ujkowice and Łętownia near Przemyśl, on south-eastern border of Poland. This research took a form of observation of local ceremonies and gatherings and we also interviewed over 30 oldest inhabitants of the villages. They shared with us their life and family stories, deeply rooted in the complicated history of the region. We focused on interviewing oldest people, and then switched to their family members and if possible spouses, to get the perspective and to compare different sides of each story.

In this area to claim an identity is a difficult task for any resident. The population, due to the course of history, consisted of a great number of nationalities, including Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, Germans, Czechs and Armenians. After the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the border between the two invaders ran through the middle of the city of Przemyśl. Themes of ghetto, forced resettlement, concentration camps and migrations are still being discussed and still reverberate, joining and parting people, even in the routine of an everyday life. Nationalities in the present day go from Polish to Ukrainian, Russian, German, Hungarian and Jew, and religious labels differ from Roman catholic, Greek catholic, Protestant and Orthodox to the traces of Judaism. Every single family is a mixture, usually by marriage, a patchwork of different traditions and ways. There are strong affinities among neighbors, confirmed by many heroic war stories told by the residents. Neighborhood is probably the strongest, an almost sacred bond between the inhabitants. But there are also stereotypes and prejudices at work and the same families and villages carry out in their memory many dark secrets- stories of hate, betrayal, murder, scape- goating, cowardice, public lynchings. Also in the modern days minorities are being cast out or stigmatized. For instance the only active orthodox monastery in the area is rumored to be formed and run by a duo of homosexual monks.

Minority identity and the construction of rights

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This presentation proposes to look at the complications and legal constraints in identity constructions with minority groups in Estonia and in northwestern Russia. Our aim is to analyse these issues from a variety of perspectives in this geo-political region. We will discuss three case studies: the Seto, their cultural heritage construction and the question of intangible rights in the border zone between Estonia and Russia; the legal regulations for identity promotion in Estonia from the perspective of the Russian-speaking minorities; the Votians and the process of claiming the minority status in Russia in the context of recent socio-economic developments.

Our clock moves at a different pace: the timescapes of identity in Estonian rural tourism

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In our paper we will consider some meaningful and meaning-forming, interconnected and sometimes opposite notions and ideas that are used by the tourism farmers and tour guides in Hiiumaa island and Võru county (two very popular tourism regions in Estonia) to (re)construct, narrate and perform local identity. We focus on these regions since people living there are in fact actively identifying themselves to be slightly different from the rest of the Estonians due to several unique historical and cultural characteristics (i.e dialect, geographical location etc.) We have been to short field trips to different municipalities in Võrumaa (Kaaristo) and Hiiumaa (Järv), studying mainly identity and tourism since 2008/2009. The paper's main focus is on the concept and notion of time as we will concentrate on the tourism farmers and tour guides who act as mediators of the different temporal quality of the experiences they provide, therefore creating various *timescapes* for their guests. An altered perception of time, a distinctive temporal experience of place is offered to the guests as a specific and special characteristic (and a counterbalance to the rush of everyday life) of the often similar but in many aspects different identity of those two rural regions.

Russian-speakers in Narva and their management of industrial identities in Soviet and post-Soviet society

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This paper aims to explore the changing and increasingly contested collective identities in a post-industrial town Narva, Estonia. During the Soviet period, Narva developed primarily as an industrial town part of which ideological discourse were economic growth and uninterrupted development. In fact, Narvans often claim that the growth did not happen on an ideological level only but it was embodied in their own experiences. Together with industrial development and the feeling of betterment strong collective identities related to industry and work emerged. The more that the majority of the local inhabitants in Narva have arrived to the town as Soviet migrants after 1945 and their collective place-related identities are shaped by their experience in Soviet and post-Soviet times only, whereas the pre-war population in Narva leans on earlier communal feelings on their identity-making.

The collapse of Soviet Union and emerging market economy hit strongly the industrial environment, brought along economic decline and multiple social problems. In turbulent times in the last 20 years when many factories got closed down the industry and work-based collective identities started to shake and weaken. But there was little on what new collective identities could have been built on. Renegotiations of ethnic origin, belonging, class and strikingly different experiences of various generations involved in identity-making process makes the situation even more complex and contested. In this paper my main argument goes that as a result of the lack of bases for self-definition, the collective identities in today's Narva are based on contradiction and resistance to the change. Based on my empirical material, I will present the prominent discourses of collective identity-making in Soviet and post-Soviet times.

My empirical material contains participatory observations and biographic interviews which I have conducted during August 2010 until June 2011 while doing ethnographic fieldwork in Narva. My informants are Russian-speaking first generation migrants.

Baltic Russian identities: discussing ethnicity, language and religion with borderland residents in Estonia and Latvia

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There are hundreds of thousands of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers living permanently in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Some of them are citizens of the Baltic States, others of Russia, still others citizens of other former republics of the Soviet Union (e.g. Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan). In addition, quite a large percentage of ethnic Russians or Russian-speakers living in the Baltic States are stateless persons. Since very large numbers of Russians and Russian-speakers moved to the Soviet Baltic republics in the Soviet period, their whole presence has often been seen as a legacy of the Soviet period only. The way the Baltic Russians are seen and discussed is further complicated and distorted by the attempts of the Russian Federation to use their status and condition as a political leverage against Estonia and Latvia (in Lithuania the number and percentage of Russians has consistently been smaller and has thus created less controversy). Moreover, in the public and political discussions, Russians in the Baltics are almost always represented as a more or less homogenous group. In my paper I wish to draw attention to some neglected aspects of the Russian presence in the Baltic states of Estonia and Latvia. First I discuss such ethnic Russian people and groups of people who have 'always' lived in the territories of today's Estonia and Latvia; and second, I point out the great variation of identities among the different members of the Russian population. The ways in which ethnic identities intertwine and interact with linguistic, religious, citizenship and local identities of individuals are analyzed, based on research results of an anthropological research project. The paper concludes with a discussion of possible new identities of people with Russian and Soviet backgrounds living permanently in the Baltics.