“You may take the boy out of village, but you cannot take the village out of the boy.”

Cultural memory and retention of identity in diasporic Tamil tales

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DAAD Guest Lecture at Würzburg University, 1.5.2016 – 16.5.2016

When the British offered the proverbial one-way ticket and forcibly migrated Tamil people to work as plantation labourers in Sri Lanka and Indian Ocean islands the people took with them a few humble cultural objects: a chutney maker, saplings of curry leaves and coriander plants, mango, coconut, and jasmine seeds, chapbook publications of Tamil folk dramas and prayers, and a lot folk tales and tunes in their memory. Today, nearly after a century, we see in Indian Ocean islands thick mango and coconut grooves filled with the fragrance of jasmine. The tales and dramas they carried with them creolized, lost their word-meanings, but persisted as sacred sound performances. Those performances united the communities and helped them to fight for their rights. Drawing upon two of National Folklore Support Centre’s publications, Indian Ocean Folktales and Folktales from Mauritius I would like to explain the nature of cultural memory, which is the basis for Tamil diasporic music and cinema.

Monday, May 9 2016, 14.00 – 15.30
Am Hubland, Philosophiegebäude, Raum 8U11b
Crossing the borders and negotiating a dignified space

Music and Cinema of Tamil diaspora

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While the retention of cultural memory has its own benefits, it also prevents the diasporic Indian communities to take advantage of the choices offered by the foreign lands, and buries them in a racism, which is an extension of Indian caste system, as depicted in the inter-racial relationships of the film, *Mississippi Masala*. With regard to the Tamil diasporic communities while first generation of immigrants continue to carry on the fights of their homeland even in the alien soils, the second generation imagines their existence and identity through collection of images and sounds in genres accessible to youngsters. M.I.A’s (born Mathangi Maya Arulpragasam, a British rap singer of Srilankan Tamil origin) music and videos offer the prototype of social imaginaries that characterise Tamil diasporic cinema. Its main message is that they cannot isolate themselves into their own world of homeland politics but they need to be active participants in the politics of their adopted homes as depicted in the film *Dheepan*.

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